LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

SIMCHAS TORAH AND PARSHAS V'ZOS HABERACHA

by

Heschel Greenberg

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON SIMCHAS TORAH AND PARSHAS V'ZOS HABERACHA

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *Simchas Torah* and Parshas Beracha, which is always read on Simchas Torah, was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

When we realize that G-d given goal we will have entered into the Messianic Age.

In the spirit of the belief of all Jews in the imminent coming of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption, all of the essays conclude with the application of the specific message of Simchas Torah to the theme of Moshiach and Geulah. Indeed, our Sages have made explicit connections from this Festival to the coming of Moshiach.

In the merit of the boundless joy of Simchas Torah may we all merit the revelation of our righteous Moshiach, and may we all dance into the true and complete Redemption, imminently!

* * *

By way of introduction, I am including a well-known Simchas Torah story that I included in one of our first e-light messages that describes the heroism and self-sacrifice of the Cantonists soldiers in tsarist Russia.

A TELLING STORY

Simchas Torah in the "Soldier's Synagogue" in a little town in Russia was a wonderful sight. There was true rejoicing with the Torah in that synagogue. The most impressive was when, at the height of rejoicing, one of the old soldiers would tell us his story:

I was a little boy of eight when the terrible order came to my father, Rabbi Shlomo, to hand over 20 boys from our town to the Czar's army. All the leading members of our community gathered in my house. My father demanded that all children be treated alike, and the recruiting be done by casting lots. The meeting continued all night and I fell asleep.

When I awoke in the morning I found my mother sitting on my bed, her eyes red from crying. I knew I was to be one of those boys who would be sent away. "Don't cry," I said, "I will come back". "I know that. What I am worried about, Dovid", "is whether you will come back a Jew." "Mother I said resolutely, "I will always be a Jew."

A few days later we were away in two wagons, roped together. The whole town came to see us off. My mother managed to throw me a package. Don't forget your Bar Mitzvah" were her parting words. It was Tefillin and a little prayer book.

In the next three years my "training" consisted a little more than a systematic preparation for conversion. During those three years I came to be regarded as the chief of our group. Being the son of a rabbi and knowing a great deal more than the others, they all looked up to me. I knew that if I would show the slightest weakness, it would break the spirit of the boys.

One day, after a terrible beating, I was brought before the sergeant and a priest. I was told of a brilliant career in the military academy, the honor and power of a governor; but if I refused, I would die miserably, never seeing my mother again.

I said I would give them an answer in three days. They took this to mean a victory for them. The next three days were the worst I ever had. The last night before I had to give my answer I had a strange dream. I was back in my little town swimming in the steam. Suddenly I felt a terrible cramp and began drowning. I grabbed for a straw I saw floating nearby. The straw turned into a golden chain, one end of which was firmly fastened to a tree. The chain

had many links growing bigger the further they were from me. The furthest chains had the names Abraham Isaac, Jacob on them followed by names familiar from the bible. The link in my hand had my own name on it and was securely held by my father's link. For a moment I felt happy but then I saw that my link was slowly breaking apart. I awoke with a start and lay crying the rest of the night.

In the morning the big mess hall was filled to capacity. At the dais sat many military men of high rank. In the hall sat many young Jewish "recruits" from my own group, as well as from other nearby units. An elaborate affair was planned for my conversion.

I was led up to the dais and asked to declare my willingness to convert. But I didn't answer immediately. Instead, I turned around and gazed at my fellow- Jewish recruits. Then I walked to the wall and took down a small hatchet that hung there. Returning to the table, I placed three fingers on it, carefully avoiding the middle one around which I hoped to wind the straps of Tefillin one day, and before anyone realized what I was about to do, I lifted the hatchet and brought it down with all my strength upon my fingers.

"There is your answer for the three days!" I exclaimed, waving my hand in their faces.

Here the old soldier stopped. He told us no more, but we knew that it was this very aged soldier who brought about the repeal of the Czar's cruel decree. When the Czar Nicholas heard, he knew that so long that boys like Dovid were among his subjects all his decrees were doomed to failure. We looked admiringly upon the aged soldier who immediately jumped up and went dancing and singing , "The Torah is our only choice, on Simchas Torah, rejoice rejoice."

ESSAY ONE

CIRCLES

The closer we get to fathom the innermost aspects of Torah in which the Divine is exposed, the greater ability we have to break out of all confining and inhibiting elements.

When that occurs, the joy is indescribable.

ESSAY ONE

CIRCLES

Why do we Go in Circles?

Has anyone ever noticed that on Simchas Torah we dance with a Torah in a circular motion; around and around the Bimah - the platform upon which the Torah is read?

Has anyone taken note of the fact that we conclude the reading of the Torah on Simchas Torah, but, we don't wait for the next occasion to begin anew? We do that minutes after we conclude. For that matter, how much attention have we given to the fact that upon concluding the Five Books of Moses we do not continue with the reading of a new book, but we begin all over again.

The Endless Nature of Torah

The answer lies in the very nature of Torah. Torah, unlike any other discipline, is infinite. It is without an end,

because it is the wisdom of the One who has no end - and no beginning.

The Song and Ring of Torah

Torah has thus been compared to a song. The Hebrew word for song *shir* also means a ring. This suggests that what makes a song unique is that it is circular; it has no beginning and has no end.

[This, by the way, one of the reasons we give a ring in marriage because marriage introduces the Divine in our lives which is infinite.]

Such is the character of Torah. Although it begins with "*Bereishs*-In the beginning," and ends with the word "in the presence of all Israel" we never stop there. No sooner do we end the Torah, we begin anew.

This is what distinguishes Torah from every other text. While the power to write anything comes from G-d, that power is severely concealed within the words of all texts, with the exception of Torah. Only Torah reflects the original light of G-d and is not in any way less Divine than its source in G-d's wisdom.

The Boundless Joy of Simchas Torah

We can now understand the reason Simchas Torah is such a joyous event although it is based on a custom and not on a Biblical or rabbinic commandant to be happy.

When we touch the endless light of the Divine nature of Torah it empowers us to "break out of our own limitations" and that is the very essence of joy. Most of the time we are confined to our nature which inhibits our emotions and our soul's natural propensity to be happy. When we touch the infinite power of Torah it enables us to break out of our mold.

The Twin Phenomena of Moshiach

Simchas Torah is thus illustrative of the Moshiach and the Messianic Era, when all the obstructions to our nature will be removed. The Messianic Age is also the age when Moshiach will reveal the deepest levels of Torah.

These two phenomena are interconnected. The closer we get to fathom the innermost aspects of Torah in which the Divine is exposed, the greater ability we have to break out of all confining and inhibiting elements. When that occurs, the joy is indescribable.

[See Essay seven for a fuller treatment of the subjects of circles.]

ESSAY TWO

PARTY FOR TWO

Just as the Torah contributes to our knowledge, observance and holiness, we also contribute to the Torah.

When a Jew studies Torah and puts his heart and soul in that study, the Jew instills a dimension of G-dly energy that we possess, exclusively, that enhances the power and holiness of Torah.

ESSAY TWO

PARTY FOR TWO

The Siyum

Simchas Torah, the day in which we rejoice with the Torah; when we conclude the annual cycle of reading the Five Books of Moses. Whenever we conclude a significant program of study — called a *Siyum* in Hebrew — it is cause for celebration. This is true with any *Siyum*, it is that much more so with regard to the completion of the cycle of the Five Books of Moses.

It is self-evident that the joy associated with a *Siyum* is connected to and encapsulated in the concluding word(s) of the text. Since the very last word of the Torah is Yisrael, Israel, it would follow, ironically, that the highlight of Simchas Torah is not Torah but Israel!

This, obviously, begs the question, would it not have been more appropriate for the Torah to have concluded with the word Torah? Furthermore, if the emphasis is on the people of Israel, why do we call the Holiday Simchas Torah, the Rejoicing with the Torah? It should have been called Simchas Yisrael, Rejoicing with Israel?

Relationship between Torah and Israel

The answer to these questions lies in a more profound understanding of the relationship that exists between Torah and the People of Israel.

Conventional wisdom dictates that since Torah was given to the Jewish people; Torah is the teacher and guide and we the Jewish people are the recipients and beneficiaries. Accordingly, from this perspective, Torah enjoys a state of preeminence over the Jewish people. Much like the advantage the teacher has over the student.

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus — based on Talmudic and Midrashic sources — however, teach us otherwise. True, the Jewish people did receive the Torah and the Torah must serve as guide that informs us as to the way we ought to live each minute of our lives. But, in addition to that relationship, there is also another dimension that links Torah to Israel in a completely different, if not opposite, direction.

We Contribute to the Torah

Just as the Torah contributes to our knowledge, observance and holiness, we also contribute to the Torah. When a Jew studies Torah and puts his heart and soul in that study, the

Jew instills a dimension of G-dly energy that we possess, exclusively, that enhances the power and holiness of Torah.

There is something about the Jewish soul that is so holy and so connected to the very essence of G-d, that even the Torah can be considered a recipient from us. We can connect the Torah to G-d's essence and thereby endow it with even greater beauty, depth and holiness.

To be sure, this does not suggest that we can "tell" the Torah what is right and what is wrong. It also does not suggest that, considering the superior nature of our soul, we may ever overlook the teachings of the Torah. What it does mean is that when we, through the study of Torah and the observance of the commandments, so refines ourselves, that our soul begins to shine, it enhances the Torah that we have learned and connects it closer to its Divine source.

Simchas Torah is thus really about two things. Firstly, it is about concluding the study of and appreciation for Torah in its own right. Once we master the Torah, or more accurately, once the Torah masters us and reveals our inner spiritual potential, we then instill even greater meaning and holiness in the Torah itself. We then begin the cycle of Torah anew with renewed vigor, enthusiasm and holiness.

In effect there is a dual celebration on Simchas Torah. The Jewish people first rejoice with the Torah, but then the

Torah upon receiving the renewed holiness from Israel, begins to rejoice with Israel. Thus the term Simchas Torah, means two things: [Israel] Rejoices with the Torah and The Torah Rejoices [with Israel].

After Yom Kippur

This explains why Simchas Torah is not observed on the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, Shavuos, but after Yom Kippur. When can the Torah rejoice with the Jewish people? Only when their souls shine brightly, which is what happens on Yom Kippur.

Simchas Torah of the Future

We can now also appreciate what our sages mean when they said that in the Messianic Age, Moshiach will reveal new dimensions of Torah.

In the Messianic Age, evil will cease to exist. At first, evil will separate itself from its admixture with good, so that the good becomes more pristine. Without its ability to siphon off vitality from the forces of holiness, the forces of evil will gradually dissipate.

At that time our souls will no longer be encumbered with the obstructing nature of evil that our bodies and Animal souls possess. As a result, our souls will shine so brightly that when we will study Torah, we will actually be able to uncover new vistas of Torah knowledge that could never have been revealed heretofore.

Simchas Torah then will truly be celebrated in an unprecedented fashion, since we will rejoice with the Torah and the Torah will surely rejoice with us in ways that we cannot even imagine.

A happy and inspiring Simchas Torah!

ESSAY THREE

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Torah is much more than just a guide for life.

Torah is the very blueprint of creation.

The only way the world can function properly is when it conforms to the plan that was responsible for its very existence.

To not follow the Torah is not just the wrong or immoral thing to do, it negates our very existence.

To follow the Torah is the most validating thing we can do.

ESSAY THREE

DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Genesis follows Deuteronomy

One of the themes of Simchas Torah, is that the end is followed by the beginning. No sooner do we conclude the reading of the entire Five Books of Moses, we begin reading from the Book of Genesis all over again.

The obvious message for us is that the Torah truly has no end. And as deep as we can plumb the mysteries of the Torah there is always a new and refreshing level of understanding that we can reach when we start learning the Torah anew.

Connection between End and Beginning

The fact that we read the beginning of Genesis after concluding the final verse of Deuteronomy suggests that there is a thematic connection between the two. In other words, the verse:

> "In the beginning G-d created heaven and the earth"

can be understood in light of the concluding verse of the Torah:

> "And for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel."

What possible connection can there be between Moses' prowess and the creation of the world by G-d?

The Divine Blueprint

One answer to this question can be traced back to the statement of the Zohar (the principal work of Kabbalah):

> "G-d looked into the Torah and created the world; man studies the Torah and sustains the world."

Torah is much more than just a guide for life. Torah is the very blueprint of creation. The only way the world can function properly is when it conforms to the plan that was responsible for its very existence. To not follow the Torah is not just the wrong or immoral thing to do, it negates our very existence. To follow the Torah is the most validating thing we can do.

We can now understand the connection between the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah.

The beginning of the Torah introduces us to the concept of creation by a Creator. More specifically the word in Hebrew "*Bereishis*" which is often translated as "In the beginning" can actually be translated (as does Rashi):

> "With the Torah (that is called "the beginning" or the primary force) G-d created heaven and earth."

This expresses the way in which the Torah was used by G-d as the very instrument of creation.

When G-d created the universe, His objective was that we continue to sustain the world by way of Torah study. So that while G-d took the initiative to create the world with the Torah blueprint, His goal was that we "take over" the process of creation by studying the Torah. The end of the Torah should thus reflect G-d's 'end", i.e., objective of creation.

This objective or "end" is reflected in the end of the Torah. According to Nachmanides and other classical commentators, the "awesome power that Moses displayed" is a reference to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Here the Torah highlights Moses' role as the one who transmitted the Torah to all of Israel. And it is through the study of Torah that we sustain the world that was created by G-d.

The end of the Torah thus speaks of how we contribute to the process of creation discussed at the beginning of the Torah.

A Deeper Connection: The End Reinforces the Beginning

We may take the connection between the end of the Torah and its beginning a step further:

The very last words are "before all Israel" (literally the translation would be: "before the eyes of all Israel"). *Or Hachaim* explains that this stresses the uniqueness of the Sinai experience. All of Israel were witnesses to the revelation of G-d to the world. Judaism does not rest on the claim of one or several people that they had a vision that they were appointed by G-d to deliver a specific message to the world. One can never know whether that individual who made the claim was not a charlatan or wasn't hallucinating.

Judaism's claim is that the entire Jewish nation witnessed the revelation of G-d on Mount Sinai, and heard how G-d summoned Moses to receive the rest of the Torah.

By ending the Torah on this note— that we were all witnesses to G-d's revelation to the world—we can easily

attest to the fact that "In the beginning G-d created heaven and earth."

Our knowledge of G-d's role in the world is not just based on philosophical speculation and rational arguments on the one hand, or strictly on blind faith on the other hand. Our knowledge of G-d as the Creator is based on our own collective experience of G-d coming to us and communicating with us.

Thus, the connection between the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah is that the end enhances our faith in what it says in the beginning. The end of the Torah adds a new dimension to its beginning.

End of Torah; End of Days

The end of the Torah reminds us of the Biblical designation of the Messianic Era as the "end of days." Just like the end of the Torah does not mean literally that it comes to an end, but that it is a stepping stone to start the Torah with a new and refreshed understanding, similarly, the "end of days" is not the end of the world. Rather it is the world reaching its goal and objective, so that we can continue on a much higher level. We then start all over again with a completely new approach to life.

Just as the end of the Torah expresses the objective of creation and reinforces the entire process of creation, so too the Messianic Age will bring to fruition and validation to all of existence from the time of creation onward.

Moreover, in the "end of days" we begin once again with the words and content of: "In the beginning," in a completely novel way. We will see not only the Divine source of creation, but also new, heretofore, hidden levels of the Divine.

Simchas Torah, when we conclude the Torah and begin it anew, is an auspicious time to usher in the new age that comes on the heels of the end of the old age.

The End!

ESSAY FOUR

DANCING TO INFINITY!

Yom Kippur constitutes the "ceremony" of marriage between G-d and the Jewish nation.

The actual celebration takes place throughout the entire festival of Sukkos, reaching its crescendo on Simchas Torah.

Marriage is initiated by the giving of a ring.

Similarly the wedding celebration of G-d and His people is expressed cyclically; a metaphor for a ring.

ESSAY FOUR

DANCING TO INFINITY

Supersedes Yom Kippur

Simchas Torah is arguably the most joyous holiday of the year. According to Jewish custom, on the last day of the festival of Sukkot, we remove the Torah scrolls from the ark and make seven circuits around the *bimah* (the platform upon which the Torah is placed when it is ready publicly – usually in the center of the synagogue) with the Torah.

In the former Soviet Union, Simchas Torah was the only holiday that brought thousands of young Jews to the synagogue where they would participate in an open and sometimes defiant display of Jewish pride. Even Yom Kippur did not have that effect.

What is it about Simchas Torah that makes it so joyous a holiday and so powerfully energizing?

Going in Circles

One of the salient features of Simchas Torah is that it involves dancing in circles. Indeed the procession with the Torah around the *bimah* is called *Hakafos*, which means circuits. Furthermore, on the day of Simchas Torah we conclude the cycle of reading the Five Books of Moses and we begin a new cycle with the reading of *Breishis*-Genesis. This underscores once more the cyclical nature of Simchas Torah.

Indeed, upon examining the various objects with which we perform the Mitzvos we will see that they involve spirals and cycles:

Tefillin—which are essentially cubes—are wrapped around the arm and head in a circular motion. Furthermore, inside the leather boxes are scrolls of parchment.

Tzitzis (fringes worn on a four cornered square garment) are made by tying a string around seven others.

A Mezuzah (a square piece of parchment) is first rolled up and then affixed to the door posts.

[Note that in all these three Mitzvos, the circular aspect of the Mitzvah is either contained within (Tefillin) or superimposed on (Tzitzis, Mezuzah) a square or

rectangular aspect of the Mitzvah. Why this is so is a subject for another discussion.]

Handmade matzah eaten on Passover is round.

We eat round Challos on Rosh Hashanah,

Chanukah and Purim feature dreidels and gragers-noise-makers which twirl in circles etc.

What is it about the circular and cyclical character of Jewish practices, particularly on Simchas Torah?

The Marital Ring

Judaism is first and foremost an expression of a relationship between G-d and the Jewish people that has been compared to a marriage.

This relationship began on Shavuos — the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

When the Jews worshipped the golden calf, forty days later and Moses shattered the tablets, the marriage between G-d and the Jewish people was "on the rocks."

The marriage was "saved" and even strengthened eighty days later — on the day of Yom Kippur — when G-d

forgave the Jewish people and gave them the second set of tablets through Moses.

Hence Yom Kippur is the day on which we relive the awesome experience of re-connecting with G-d and the reinforcement of our relationship with Him.

Now while Yom Kippur constitutes the "ceremony" of marriage between G-d and the Jewish nation, the actual celebration takes place throughout the entire festival of Sukkot, reaching its crescendo on Simchas Torah.

Just as marriage is initiated by the giving of a ring, similarly the wedding celebration of G-d and His people is expressed cyclically; a metaphor for a ring.

Touching the Infinite

But why is a marriage initiated with the giving of a ring?

There are many legal and practical reasons for the preference of a ring to execute the marriage, even though any article of value would be adequate.

According to the mystical tradition of Judaism a ring which is endless symbolizes the idea that marriage generates infinite divine energy. The institution of marriage is not just a social convention; it introduces a new and divine

energy into the couple, which enables them to fulfill their Divine purpose.

By dancing in circles and reading the Torah in cycles we express the infinite nature of our relationship with G-d. We indicate that our relationship is akin to a marriage, which enables us to touch G-d's infinite light.

Moreover, by dancing in circles on Simchas Torah we underscore that the Torah—through which our relationship with G-d is effected—is likewise of an infinite nature. One can never fathom its beauty, depth and holiness. It attests to the Divine nature of Torah that transcends and eclipses its profound intellectual dimension.

The reason why Torah is also considered to be of an infinite scope is because the Torah and G-d are essentially one. Maimonides explains this concept by establishing G-d's unity with all His attributes. Hence if Torah is His wisdom, He and His wisdom are essentially one. If G-d is infinite then Torah is also infinite.

Before we are ready to get into the "meat" of the Torah by commencing a new annual cycle of Torah reading on Simchas Torah and on the following Shabbat, we must first connect to its transcendent and infinite nature that cannot be grasped by reading or studying.

The Rebbe explained on many occasions that for this reason we dance with the Torah as it is covered. The covered Torah scroll points to the joy we have with that aspect of Torah which goes beyond human comprehension, and in relation to which we are all equal. The simple Jew is as much connected to the Torah as the scholar.

Simchas Torah with Moshiach

There are however two "drawbacks" to the dancing of Simchas Torah as long as we are in exile.

First, our relationship with G-d—notwithstanding its comparison to a marriage—is somewhat strained. We do not always see the love and affection displayed in an ideal marriage. That will be remedied with the coming of Moshiach at which time the marriage will be complete.

Second, the Torah that we study today in these exile conditions does not express its full G-dly character. Only when Moshiach will teach Torah to all of Israel will we all see its infinite Divine character.

To prepare for that time, which we anticipate imminently, we must endeavor to focus on the infinite nature of Torah and affirm it by joyous dancing in circles with the Torah. When we appreciate the infinite nature of Torah it

energizes us and prepares us for the time when our marriage will be fully expressive of its infinite nature. It will be Simchas Torah every day.

Why Now?

On the other hand, there is something special to the celebration of Simchas Torah in recent times. Only in the last few centuries did Simchas Torah enjoy such popularity. And it seems to be increasing year by year.

The question can be raised why the custom of Simchas Torah was not part of the original Festival celebration but it is of relatively recent vintage?

The answer lies in the realization that as time progresses we get closer and closer to the Final Redemption. As mentioned above, as long as we are in exile, we cannot fully fathom the infinity of Torah because of the constraints exile imposes on us and our comprehension.

The closer we get to the time when G-d will reveal the full infinite nature of Torah the more we sense both consciously and subliminally the circular nature of Torah.

When we appreciate the infinite nature of Torah it energizes us and prepares us for the time when our

marriage will be fully expressive of its infinite nature, when it will be Simchas Torah every day.

ESSAY FIVE

THE JEWISH MASTER CARD

On Simchas Torah, as we dance with the Torah, we should feel secure in the knowledge that the Torah feels comfortable with us.

The mere fact that the Torah is extending us "credit" is indicative of the trust the G-d, the Giver of the Torah, has in our ability to pay back all that we have "purchased" on credit.

ESSAY FIVE

THE JEWISH MASTER CARD

Two-fold Celebration

Simchas Torah is when Jews dance with the Torah around the *Bimah* (the platform upon which the Torah is read). This custom is known as *Hakafos*, or circuits, because we dance around the *bimah*.

When we dance with the Torah we have to bear in mind that there is a two-fold celebration. On the one hand, we dance with the Torah to express our joy that we have been given the greatest gift of all; the gift of true life itself, for the Torah is what makes our lives meaningful and worth living.

On the other hand, the Torah also rejoices with us. The Torah appreciates the fact that it cannot accomplish anything without the people who study and implement its teachings. Our dancing feet thus become the feet of the Torah itself.

Allaying our Fears

There can, however, be some hesitation on our part. When we reflect on that which the Torah gives us and then compare it with what we do for the Torah, we might feel that we do not deserve to have the Torah dance and rejoice with us. Perhaps we are not worthy?

To allay any such fears that might inhibit our total expression of joy on Simchas Torah as we dance with the Torah, it would serve us well to reflect on another definition of the word *Hakafos*. Besides the simple translation, *Hakafah* can also mean buying something on credit.

Credit

On Simchas Torah G-d gives us all the inspiration and blessing we need for the rest of the year, even before we invest the necessary effort in anticipation of our repayment of the "debt," throughout the rest of the year.

On Simchas Torah, as we dance with the Torah, we should feel secure in the knowledge that the Torah feels comfortable with us. The mere fact that the Torah is extending us "credit" is indicative of the trust the G-d, the

Giver of the Torah, has in our ability to pay back all that we have "purchased" on credit.

Your Brother's And Your Wedding

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the famous Chassidic sage, asked a simple Jew who was dancing ecstatically with the Torah, why he rejoiced with the Torah he had hardly ever studied? The simple Jew's response – Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was so eager to elicit – was: "one rejoices at a brother's wedding, as if it were his own."

The Rebbe added that, in truth, every Jew, regardless of his level of Torah knowledge and observance, should feel, when they dance on Simchas Torah that they are dancing at their own wedding, for the Torah belongs equally to every Jew and every Jew belongs equally to the Torah.

Simchas Torah, thus, means two things: that the Jew rejoices with the Torah and that the Torah rejoices with every Jew.

Moshiach Rejoices on Simchas Torah

In one of the special prayers recited on Simchas Torah, reference is made to Moshiach's rejoicing on Simchas Torah and that he is likely to arrive on this day.

Moshiach is the one who will usher in an age when our connection to the Torah and the Torah's connection to us will be complete. Consequently, we will receive payment for the "debt" G-d owes us for all of what we've accomplished throughout our long and arduous journey in exile because we have, as a people paid our debts in full.

ESSAY SIX

JEWISH SPIN DOCTORS

The joy of Simchas Torah is not limited to the connection we enjoy with the Torah commensurate with our limited service.

Rather, they joy is unlimited, because it derives from our intrinsic connection to Torah that comes from Above.

This connection is beyond the parameters and confines of human endeavor.

ESSAY SIX

JEWISH SPIN DOCTORS

Dual meaning of *Hakafos*

On Simchas Torah we rejoice with the Torah. The traditional dance with the Torah called *Hakafos* (circuits) involves the removal of all the Torah scrolls from the ark and to then circle the table upon which the Torah is read (Bimah) with them, and then dance with the Torah scrolls. All of this is designed to demonstrate the extent to which the Jewish people rejoice with the Torah they were given.

The term *Hakafos*, the colloquialism used for the traditional dancing with the Torah around the *Bimah* possesses yet another meaning. According to Chassidic thought the term *hakafah* (singular of *Hakafos*) can also mean "[the extension of] credit."

During Simchas Torah, G-d allots the Jewish people the requisite energies for the entire year on credit, in anticipation of their repayment of the debt with the

observance of Torah and Mitzvos throughout the year. [See preceding essay.]

Can Everyone Rejoice?

There is, however, a need to further clarify this matter.

Rejoicing with the Torah on Simchas Torah can be appreciated when it is a person whose relationship with the Torah is ideal. For such an individual, the joy he experiences upon realizing how fortunate he was to have received it, is matched by the Torah's joy at having been given to him

For the Jew whose connection to Torah is less than ideal, however, a serious question arises. How can such a Jew be permitted to take the Torah and dance with it? How can we allow him the right to express his joy in possessing the Torah, when the Torah scroll is hardly pleased with its association with him?

The Inner Connection

The answer to this dilemma is that while it is true that the individual's relationship with the Torah – based on his past year's behavior – leaves much to be desired, nevertheless,

an inner connection with Torah does, in fact, exist. This connection exists not of the individual's own accord, but because G-d established this intrinsic connection between a Jew and the Torah.

Because of this inner connection that exists between each and every Jew and Torah, their state of Jewish commitment notwithstanding, they have the right, ability, and, indeed, the obligation, to participate in *Hakafos*. The inner connection of every Jew to the Torah is what makes the joy of *Hakafos* expressive not only of the Jewish person's joy with the Torah, but also of the Torah's joy with (every) Jewish person.

Added Dimension

Even with regard to those Jews, whose connection to Torah is intact, there is an added dimension to their joy. Their joy is not limited to the connection they enjoy with the Torah commensurate with their limited service. Rather, they joy is unlimited, because it derives from their intrinsic connection to Torah that comes from Above. This connection is beyond the parameters and confines of human endeavor.

What has been said thus far is that every Jew possesses an internal link to the Torah, and that is what justifies G-d's extension of "credit" (*Hakafos*) to all on Simchas Torah..

Intertwined Explanations

Upon deeper reflection we will see that the deeper meaning of *hakafah*, credit, is related to its plain meaning of circling the *bimah* with the Torah in hand.

The issuance of credit (the alternative translation of *hakafah*) implies that although the recipient is not now worthy of receiving the object – inasmuch as he had not paid the seller its fair value -- nevertheless, he is given the object gratis, with the stipulation that he pay for it later.

Applying this concept to Simchas Torah, every Jew is granted the right and, indeed, the obligation to circle the *Bimah*, dance and rejoice with the Torah. This privilege we possess because of our intrinsic connection with the Torah, is not because of our own worthiness, but because it is bestowed upon us by G-d, (in anticipation of our subsequent repayment of this debt

Seven for Seven

Seven *Hakafos* (circuits with the Torah as well as seven separate extensions of spiritual "credit") are necessary, because the extension of "credit" from Above relates to all of the seven emotional traits of the soul which are: kindness, judgment, harmony, victory, persistence, bonding

and leadership. [In the texts of Kabbalah and Chassidus, there are alternate translations for some of these seven emotions.]

In other words, the first *Hakafah* (circuit) is associated with the extension of "credit" for the attribute of kindness; the second *Hakafah* represents the extension of "credit" in conjunction with the attribute of judgment, and similarly with respect to all of the other attributes.

The extension of "credit" to all of the soul's emotional characteristics is what affects one's genuine and complete connection with the Torah. To be totally attached to Torah it must affect all of our personality.

Simchas Torah of the Future

This process will be complete in the Days of Moshiach. At that time all of our debts will be paid and our joy will be boundless.

One of the characteristics of exile is that we cannot express our emotions. The more a person suffers the more bottled up become their feelings. Liberation in the psychological sense is when a person has the capacity to express their full complement of emotions.

A very special Jew related to me his childhood memories. He lived in a part of the former Soviet Union and witnessed some of the effects of the war. Family members and others were dying in the streets from hunger. The horrific nature of what he experienced prevented him from even crying for a few years. By Divine Providence, one Simchas Torah, having been taken under the wings of a compassionate elderly Chosid, broke down crying. The Chosid was ecstatic at the child's ability to express some emotion. That was the beginning of his emotional liberation.

As long as our emotions are occluded and prevented from being fully expressed we cannot adequately celebrate Simchas Torah.

In the Messianic Era, Moshiach, whose name is associated with simcha-joy, will inspire us with his simcha and enable us to fully embrace the Torah in its totality by the totality of our being.

ESSAY SEVEN

DANCING LEAVES AND DANCING FEET

G-d does not manifest Himself where one's ego leaves no room for Him.

True joy can only be experienced when our emotional state is healthy and vibrant.

However, the ultimate experience of joy is when we are in touch with our soul, our G-dly life.

ESSAY SEVEN

DANCING LEAVES AND DANCING FEET

Shaking the Lulav versus Shaking our Feet

We are presently in the rejoicing mode. From the first day of Sukkos through Simchas Torah, we were commanded by G-d to rejoice, and rejoice we do.

However, the manner of rejoicing varies from the Festival of Sukkos to the Festival of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. During the former, the joy is expressed primarily by shaking the Lulav, whereas on Simchas Torah, our rejoicing manifests itself by dancing with the Torah. To be sure, during Sukkos we also dance, but the Biblical commandments to rejoice during Sukkos is contained within the context of shaking the Lulav.

There are several questions that need to be addressed. First, what is the difference between these two modes of joy? Second, how does one express joy by shaking a Lulav?

The nature of joy is that it opens up the person and permits him or her to be free to go in different directions.

Ordinarily, the leaves of the Lulav are closed. When we shake the Lulav—which is held close to our hearts—and the leaves spread apart, it signifies the opening of our hearts.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Joy

But, the joy of Simchas Torah goes beyond that of Sukkos in, at least, two significant ways.

First, whereas the shaking of the Lulav is a symbol of joy because it inspires us to rejoice, it is not an intrinsically joyous experience. While the Lulav is shaken, the person can remain unaffected. One can shake a Lulav and not even know that it is supposed to represent a state of joy.

Dancing, by contrast, is an intrinsic expression of joy. Even a person who is sad will experience joy when he or she starts to dance. The act of dancing itself will generate the feeling of joy and ecstasy.

Hands and Feet

There is also a second salient difference between the joy associated with the shaking of the Lulav and the joy of dancing on Simchas Torah. Shaking a Lulav involves

movement of the hands, while dancing on Simchas Torah involves movement of the feet. As we shall see, both of these movements reflect two levels of movement that have the capacity to generate true feelings of joy.

The Anatomy of Joy

To better understand the difference, we must first analyze the anatomy of sadness and joy. When a person is closed, his or her emotions occluded, he or she will feel sad and even depressed. Joy is synonymous with life, and when our feelings—an expression of our life—are inhibited, we cannot be happy. Life must be lived to its fullest to experience joy.

Similarly, when we are one-dimensional and are confined to one mode of emotional expression and lack the ability to experience all of the other dimensions of life, we will also find true joy to be elusive because we are not in touch with all of our life's functions.

Thus, to generate feelings of joy we must "open up" and allow all of our feelings to be expressed. This is symbolized by the shaking and dancing of the Lulav leaves, where the otherwise closed Lulav leaves begin to open up.

Furthermore, the movement, or "dancing" of the Lulav leaves from one place and direction to another, implies that we are able to "dance" and jump from one emotional place to another and are not limited to only one dimension of our personality. When we can express the full range of emotions, we are in touch with our emotional vitality. And that is one definition of joy.

There is, however, one more path to true joy, which comes when we removes the primary obstacle to happiness—our ego. When we are so full of ourselves, we cannot experience the true nature of life, namely our own Divine soul.

Ego: The Obstacle to Joy

G-d does not manifest Himself where one's ego leaves no room for Him. To be sure, true joy can only be experienced when our emotional state is healthy and vibrant. However, the ultimate experience of joy is when we are in touch with our soul, our G-dly life.

This, then, is what the dancing of Simchas Torah adds to the joy of the "dancing leaves" of Sukkos. Whereas on Sukkos we are given the opportunity to open up emotionally and enjoy the full range of emotional vitality, Simchas Torah dancing, which lifts us off the ground, takes

us away from our place. We are no longer attached to the ground, earthiness and ego that limit the soul's expression. Consequently, our soul is free to shine through us, allowing its joyous light to be experienced.

The Ultimate Expression of Joy

Ultimate true joy, however, cannot be fully experienced in the time of Galus, exile. And while Simchas Torah gives us a good taste of that joy, we await eagerly for such time that our souls will be capable of fully expressing themselves, with no obstruction. Hence, the Psalmists declares, "**Then** our mouths will be filled with laughter." "Then," refers to the Messianic Age, at which time our joy will be complete and Simchas Torah will be a daily occurrence.

If there are three manifestations of joy: openness, expansiveness and ego-less-ness, we can understand why we cannot experience the full measure of joy until the Messianic Age.

Galus or exile is the greatest constraining force known to us. And while it allows us to express some of our more base instincts and expand into all areas of expression, the state of exile denies us the ability to express our true G-dly nature. Furthermore, even when there is some measure of G-dly energy expressed it is usually confined to a narrow part of our lives.

Geulah, Redemption is more than just freedom from oppression. It is about freeing us to be our true unconstrained inner selves; to be able to dance freely and enjoy a perpetual Simchas Torah.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE END IS WEDGED IN THE BEGINNING

When we conclude the Torah we begin anew.

While returning to the beginning we start all over on an entirely new level.

The Genesis that we will read this year after concluding the Torah is an entirely different Genesis from the one we read last year.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE END IS WEDGED IN THE BEGINNING

Roshpursukahoshatzeretorah!

No that was not a typo. It is a combination of parts of every Holiday in the month of Tishrei: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Hoshana Rabbah, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. The reason for combining them was to underscore the symbiotic nature of al these Holidays.

Simchas Torah—the Holiday in which we dance with the Torah in seven circuits around the *Bimah* (the platform in the center of the synagogue upon which the Torah is read)—is not only the culmination of the Sukkos Holiday, it is also the conclusion of the entire series of Holidays we celebrate during the month of Tishrei.

Simchas Torah is also—not by accident or coincidence—the day in which we conclude the annual cycle of Torah reading.

It becomes quite obvious that Simchas Torah revolves around (pun intended) the theme of conclusion.

But Judaism has a unique view of conclusion.

Unique Concept of Conclusion

All cultures have a concept of reaching a milestone that involves the conclusion of one phase of life, such as graduations and other life cycle events. Birth is the end result of pregnancy. Puberty is the end of childhood. Marriage is the end of single life. Divorce is the end of marriage. Death is the end of life, and so on. When we come to the end of one phase of life we then, hopefully, go on to a more advanced and better place.

Judaism is no exception to this process. We too have graduations from one stage of life to the next. We also believe that when we conclude one phase we proceed onward to a higher level. However, Simchas Torah exemplifies Judaism's introduction of a new dimension of what a conclusion of a phase is really all about.

When we conclude the Torah on Simchas Torah we do two things. We go on to the next level. We do this when we read a selection from the Biblical book of Joshua; the Biblical book that follows the Five Books of Moses that we just concluded.

However, even before we read the selection from the Book of Joshua, we go back to the beginning of the Torah—the Book of Genesis. Even as we are ready to go on to the next book and level, we return to the beginning of the text we just completed.

He way we look at Torah and of life we combine a linear and cyclical approach.

On the surface this sounds strange. To the superficial ear it sounds like the equivalent of saying that upon graduating from Elementary School and entering into High School we will simultaneously repeat kindergarten. Or, when we get married and end our status as single we simultaneously become single again?! This sounds preposterous!

The Same while Totally New

Upon deeper reflection this dual process—entering into a new and higher phase, while returning to the beginning—actually means that when we finish the Torah we start all over; but on an entirely new level. The Genesis that we will read this year after concluding the Torah is an entirely different Genesis from the one we read last year.

Translating this concept into our lives this means that when we reach a milestone, it does not suggest that we

have departed from the preceding period. It really means that we take the preceding period with us into the next phase of our lives.

Taking Your Youthful Endeavors with You

For example, the Mishnah—in discussing the various ages for different levels of study—states:

> "A five year old is for [the study of] Scripture, a ten year old is for [the study of] Mishnah, a thirteen year old is [the age of] Bar Mitzvah, a fifteen year old is for [the study of] Talmud..."

It is obvious that our Sages did not mean to suggest that after the child reaches the age of ten he no longer studies scripture. Nor does it mean to suggest that after the child reaches the age of fifteen and commences to study Talmud that he ceases to pursue the study of scripture and Mishnah and also ceases to be a Bar Mitzvah—one who is obligated to fulfill the commandments.

What it does mean is that when the child studies Talmud after concluding his five years of Mishnah and Scripture, his understanding of Mishnah and Scripture are greatly enhanced. It adds new depth and an entirely new perspective to these areas of study.

Similarly, when we finish the Torah reading on Simchas Torah we begin studying Genesis anew, but with a fresh and enhanced perspective. While the Torah we will learn this year will contain the identical words of last year's study it will convey to us the same material with a deeper and more sublime message than it imparted to us in the past years.

With this introduction in mind we can understand why classical Torah commentators find it necessary to link the last words of the Torah with its opening words. It is not an exercise in mental gymnastics or casuistry; it is the way we are supposed to learn Torah. We proceed from the end to the beginning in a seamless fashion; just as we would go from verse one to verse two.

Eulogy and Cosmology

Let us examine the last verse of the Torah and its follow up verse, the first verse of Genesis.

The last verse of the Torah concludes the eulogy G-d delivers about Moses at the time of his passing. After stating that there will never be a prophet the same as Moses, it lists some of his accomplishments; the miracles he performed in Egypt. And then the Torah concludes with:

> "And all of his mighty hand and all of his great awesomeness that Moses performed before the eyes of all of Israel."

The Torah then continues in the beginning of Genesis:

> "In the beginning, G-d created heaven and earth."

What is the connection between the wonders Moses wrought before all of Israel and the narrative of G-d creating heaven and earth?"

The Twin Themes: Creation and Liberation

One approach to this can be found in the analysis between the two themes: Moses' wonders at the time of the Exodus and the creation of heaven and earth. These two themes—the wonders performed at the time of the Exodus and the Creation of heaven and earth—form the dual theme of the Kiddush prayer we recite every Friday night as we usher in the Sabbath. The Sabbath is both a remembrance of the Exodus and the Creation.

In the Ten Commandments, however, when G-d first introduces Himself to the Jewish people, he only mentions His role as the One who took the Jews out of Egypt.

The famous medieval Rabbi Yehudah Halevi asked a simple question:

Why is it that in the Ten Commandments, G-d identifies Himself as the One who took them out of Egypt and not that He is the G-d that created heaven and earth, which is clearly the greatest miracle of all; creation something out of absolute nothingness!

Many answers have been propounded, the most famous of which is that creation is something that we cannot see. We did not witness the process of creation. We did witness the process of liberation. We were a part of it. We felt the yoke of slavery and we were relieved when we were freed from that onerous yoke.

Moreover, our identification with the Egyptian Exodus is not just a matter of ancient history that we try to relive. In every generation, the Jewish people witnessed different forms of salvation from threats to their physical and spiritual existence that they emerged from intact as a people.

But creation? Who ever saw the emergence of something out of nothing? It is not something that we can appreciate. And it is therefore difficult for us to relate to something we can neither visualize nor comprehend. G-d therefore identifies Himself as the Liberator, the One who is involved in our lives, indeed, in the most dramatic way.

Once we see G-d's involvement in our lives by way of His liberating us, collectively and individually, from exile—at the time of the Exodus as well as throughout Jewish history—we can begin to appreciate His role in the creation of the world as well.

The power of logic we possess allows us to draw the following inference: If G-d can control the world and even alter the course of nature, if He is its ultimate Master, He must also have a "hand" in the very creation of nature itself.

That is the message that we receive when we read the last verse of the Torah:

> "And all of his mighty hand and all of his great awesomeness that Moses performed before the eyes of all of Israel."

What did the eyes of all of Israel perceive? Moses' channeling of G- d's mighty hand and the miracles that accompanied the Exodus from Egypt.

A Higher Level of Perception: No More Inferences

However, when we start the Torah anew and read this last verse in conjunction with the next-first verse of the Torah it reads:

> "Before all the eyes of Israel. In the beginning G-d created heaven and earth."

This represents a higher level of perception. This refers to the next cycle where our eyes not only perceive the miracles that G-d performs for us. But, moreover, the eyes of all Israel can see the Divine power of G–d in creation as well. We no longer have to infer G-d's role in creation from is role in Liberation. We can see it directly.

This direct approach to seeing G-d in creation is also alluded to in the very first verse of the Torah. The Hebrew word "*bara*" which translates as "created" also possesses another meaning: "revealed." The verse can now be re-translated as

> "The primary thing is to reveal G-d in the heaven and the earth."

This was G-d's original plan for the universe and was made elusive for thousands of years.

However, with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai through Moses, it enabled us to open our eyes to seeing the Divine in everything.

This next cycle of "direct" realization of G-d's role in creation will become manifest in the Messianic Age when—as the prophet Isaiah declares:

> "The glory of G-d will be revealed and every flesh will see the word of G-d."

This is interpreted in Chassidic literature to mean that even our fleshy eyes will perceive the Divine power of G-d's speech vested in all of creation. In other words, we will not only be able to infer from G-d's involvement in altering nature that He is the Creator of the universe; we will be able to see directly G-d's creative power in all of creation.

The ability to see the Divine in every aspect of life, although it began with the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, it was further enhanced by the revelation of the esoteric wisdom of the Torah, the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus.

Beresishis: The Great Luminaries of Kabbalah and Chassidus

It all began with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai the author of the Zohar, the teachings of which were revealed only to a select few. Subsequently, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the Ari, began the process of widening the circle of Kabbalists, but it wasn't until Rabbi Yisroel Ba'al Shem Tov the founder of the Chassidic movement, when these esoteric teachings were introduced to the general public in one form or another.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement and the author of the Tanya, took the process of revealing G-dliness to us by rendering the heretofore esoteric teachings accessible to the human mind.

The final step of spreading the wellsprings of Chassidus to the entire word began with the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yoseph Yitzchak. It was though his heroic efforts that these teachings spread to all the continents and translated into many languages.

All of this paved the way for our own generation's readiness to greet Moshiach, through the leadership of the Rebbe, who has brought these teachings to an unprecedented number of Jews on all levels.

It is fascinating to note that all of these great luminaries who made the Divine closer our eyes are hinted in the very first word of the Torah: *Bereishis.* The Rebbe's initials are also hinted in that verse in the word *shamayim.*

Within this word/verse one can find the initials of all the foregoing luminaries, whose contribution to the process of bringing Moshiach was pivotal. It was through their collective efforts—and many other—that the world is ready to greet Moshiach and be exposed to unadulterated G-dly light; light that our eyes can see without any filter or screen.

ESSAY NINE

MOSES IS ALIVE AND WELL!

Every one of us possesses a spark of Moses in our soul.

There are times when this spark is ignited and our awareness of G-d is awakened. At times like these we feel spiritually empowered and we become passionate for G-d and for all that is G-dly.

ESSAY NINE

MOSES IS ALIVE AND WELL!

Who Wrote the Last Eight Verses?

The Torah reading for Simchas Torah is the last parsha entitled "*V'zos haberacha*-And this is the blessing," referring to the blessings Moses gave the Jewish people before his passing. This Torah reading concludes with the moving description of Moses' passing and burial.

The Talmud raises an obvious question. We know that Moses wrote the entire Torah. Who wrote the last eight verses that speak of Moses' passing?

One opinion states that it was Joshua, Moses' disciple and successor, who wrote these last eight verses. According to the second opinion, Moses wrote these words, but with one difference: These last eight verses he wrote with tears. In other words, G-d dictated these verses to Moses and Moses wrote them while he was shedding tears. Alternatively, as some commentators explain, instead of ink, Moses used his tears to write his own eulogy.

Upon reflection, the Talmud's original question still remains according to this opinion. How could Moses have written about his death before he actually died?

Granted that G-d could have dictated this to him, but how could Moses have written the words that described his passing as an event that happened while he was still alive? And although Moses was a prophet and could have been given a glimpse into the future, why does the Torah then employ the past tense with regard to his passing when he still very much alive?

To answer this question we must first appreciate that the Torah is not a history book. To be sure, every event recorded in the Torah is historically accurate. However, the purpose of the Torah is not to teach us the chronology of events even when it describes these events in vivid detail. The main objective of the Torah is to provide us with guidance in our own lives.

When the Torah describes Moses' passing it wishes to convey a spiritual and moral lesson for us.

The Internal Moses

Every one of us possesses a spark of Moses in our soul. So states Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the

Chabad Chassidic movement, known as the Alter Rebbe) in his classic work Tanya (Chapter 42).

This premise, Tanya explains, sheds light on the statement in the Torah that says: "What is G-d asking of you? Only to fear (or better: to revere) G-d…" The Talmud asks, "Is fear of G-d a minor matter?" And the Talmud answers, "Yes, for Moses it is a minor matter." This answer begs the obvious question. Why does the Torah ask us to revere G-d because it is a "minor" matter, when it is only minor for Moses? What good is it for everyone else that for Moses it is a minor matter?

Rabbi Schneur Zalman answers that, in truth, each and every one of us has a spark of Moses in his or her soul. From the vantage point of this spark, revering G-d is indeed a minor matter. Reverence for G-d is easily achievable when we ignite the spark of Moses that is embedded within our soul.

There are times when this spark is ignited and our awareness of G-d is awakened. At times like these we feel spiritually empowered and we become passionate for G-d and for all that is G-dly. Yet there are times when it seems that the spark of Moses within us has died. What are we to do then? How do we cope with this apparent loss of our internal Moses?

Dimmed Spark: Also a Part of Torah

The Torah thus concludes with a description of the death of Moses to inform us that this phenomenon is not outside the pale of the Torah. And it is a situation that ought not frighten us or dampen our spirits. Even this situation is part of the Torah, which means that it is part of the process of spiritual growth. Even when we are at a spiritual low, when the light of our internal Moses appears to have been extinguished, we should not worry. It is part of the process.

And this phenomenon is described at the end of the Torah. This suggests that even when we think we have reached the zenith, we can suddenly experience a drastic change in our spiritual lives; we cannot access the Moses within—Moses seems to have died within us.

This phenomenon of spiritual degeneration is indeed the definition of death. According to the Zohar the spiritual definition of death is the decline to a lower level. And it is a relative description. A person who has reached the pinnacle and then regresses somewhat has experienced a form of spiritual death.

And since we cannot always maintain the same spiritual high; when we begin to fall, when the Moses component of our soul seems to have died, we should not despair or panic. G-d always provides a fallback position that enables

us to function spiritually even as we seem to have temporarily lost our hold on the higher level.

License for Individuals

Perhaps this is the underlying meaning of the enigmatic statement in the Talmud that these last eight verses can be read even by an individual. The standard requirement of a minyan, a quorum of ten adult men, to read the Torah publically, is dispensed with. Commentators grapple with this law.

In light of the above, the license for an individual to read these verses was meant to convey the message that even an individual who finds his or her Moses' spark dimmed should not fret. He or she is not left out of the Torah. Even these last eight verses containing what appears to be a "eulogy", cannot be taken as a sign of one's spiritual demise.

The "Joshua" Contingency Plan

This message of consolation to the "fallen" spiritual individual is encapsulated in the Torah's description of how G-d told Moses that He would be with Joshua just as he was with Moses. Even when the internal Moses "passes on,"

G-d appoints a "successor" that takes his place until such time when we regain our spiritual high and reignite the spark of Moses in us.

True, the Biblical Joshua could not compare to Moses, but nevertheless his devotion to Moses was so powerful that he reflected Moses' light; as the Talmud states:

> "Moses' face shone like the sun, and Joshua's face shone like the moon."

Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so too, Joshua reflected Moses' spiritual qualities.

Moses Never Died

This idea will assist us in understanding the statement of the Talmud that "Moses never died." Chassidic thought clarifies that Moses' soul lives on and is present in the lives of all of the great Jewish leaders throughout history. When a leader devotes his life to being a faithful disciple of Moses—as did Joshua—he is said to possess Moses' soul and is a reflector of his light.

Translating this thought into practical terms this Torah lesson teaches us that even when we do not feel inspired because the spark of Moses within is hidden and has experienced a form of death, we should know that there is

always a backup light that can provide us with a reflection of the light of Moses.

The only prerequisite to access Joshua's reflective light is to emulate Joshua's devotion to Moses. As long as we try to stay connected to the Moses within—and the spiritual leader, the "Moses" of the generation—we will be able to have his light inspire us even when it seems that it had died.

First Redeemer and Last Redeemer

Our Sages tell us that Moses was the first redeemer and Moses will be the final redeemer. As commentators point out, this does not mean that Moses will be resurrected to become the Moshiach who will bring an end to the exile and usher in the Messianic Age. It means that Moshiach, in addition to his own qualities, will be a perfect reflection of Moses' soul. Moshiach will embody the ideals of Moses in the most dramatic and revealed fashion.

And just as we all possess the spark of Mosses within us, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that we also possess a spark of Moshiach within us.

When the spark of Moses-Moshiach within us is strong, our faith in and anticipation for the arrival of Moshiach is

likewise strong. And this strong faith manifests itself in the way we behave; we cease to be affected by exile conditions and we are no longer tainted with the exile mentality. We are joyous and optimistic and our good deeds are infused with life and enthusiasm.

However, there are times when it seems that Moses has "died," when we lose that strong feeling of anticipation and excitement for the Redemption, and we fall back into exile feelings of doom and gloom.

Remedy for Depressing Times

It is for these depressing times that the Torah concludes with the description of Moses' passing and the worthiness of his successor Joshua. "Don't worry, Moses spirit is still here with us, though it may be concealed. And the spark of Moses-Moshiach will certainly soon be reignited."

Even when it seems that Moses/Moshiach is not with us, if we behave like the Joshua's of the past and faithfully reflect the light of Moshiach, we will discover that, as the Rebbe told us, Moshiach is truly here. All we have to do is open our eyes in the spirit of the last verse of the Torah which describes the feats Moses performed in front of the "eyes of all of Israel." Once our intellectual eyes are open to the

reality of Moses/Moshiach, we will then see the reality of the final Redemption unfold before our eyes of flesh!

ESSAY TEN

SIMCHAS TORAH AND THE POWER OF A JEWISH CUSTOM

Simchas Torah demonstrates our love for G-d's Torah.

It elicits an extraordinary measure of Divine pleasure, as it were. For it indicates that G-d is close to us and is not just an Authority figure.

ESSAY TEN

SIMCHAS TORAH AND THE POWER OF A JEWISH CUSTOM

Customary Joy

The three sequential Holidays: Sukkos, Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are all part of a continuum of joy. Sukkos is designated in our prayers as "The Season of our Rejoicing." This description is based on an explicit Biblical commandment to rejoice during the festival of Sukkos. Shemini Atzeres, which is simultaneously an independent holiday as well as the eighth day of Sukkos, is likewise under the general directive to rejoice.

The rejoicing of Simchas Torah—when we complete the annual cycle of reading the Five Books of Moses, and we celebrate the occasion by dancing ecstatically with the Torah—is not mentioned in the Torah. It is not even a rabbinical command such as the holiday of Chanukah. It is rooted in Jewish custom. Yet, the joy and exhilaration that is expressed universally on Simchas Torah seems to far

outpace the joy of all other Biblical Holidays including Sukkos.

This begs an obvious question. Why has the joy of Simchas Torah, which is only rooted in custom, assumed a more prominent role in Jewish life than the other Biblically ordained Holidays. The question is even more pronounced with regard to Sukkos, which is the only Holiday that is characterized as "The Season of our rejoicing."

One answer lies in the role of Jewish customs in general. While a Biblical commandment obviously takes precedence over a custom—as worthy and positive the custom may be—the joy that accompanies the observance of a valid custom surpasses that of the performance of even a Biblical commandment.

Parent-Child Analogy

To understand why there is so much joy in a custom a simple analogy has been offered:

A parent is certainly pleased when his or her child follows explicit orders. The parent, however, will be thrilled when the child anticipates his or her desire and fulfills it even before he/she verbalizes it.

When we anticipate someone else's desires and execute them joyfully it is a sign that we have a unique and loving relationship with the other.

Hence, Simchas Torah—a celebration that we anticipated, as our way of demonstrating our love for G-d's Torah—elicits an extraordinary measure of Divine pleasure, as it were. For it indicates that G-d is close to us and is not just an Authority figure.

What is Unique about the Simchas Torah Custom?

One could ask a simple question. Aren't all customs an expression of how we anticipate G-d's will which, in turn, elicits G-d's greater love for us? What distinguishes the customs associated with Simchas Torah from all other customs?

For example there is Jewish custom to eat kreplach (a ravioli type of food) on the day before Yom Kippur and blintzis on Shavuos; yet no one dances and celebrates the fact that these culinary traditions are an expression of our love for G-d. Why is Simchas Torah different?

The answer is quite simple. Whatever the reason for eating kreplach or blintzis and the like, there is no overt expression of love in the performance of these customs

other than the fact that a custom itself is an expression of love. However, once a custom is observed, people will forget the love of G-d part of it and indulge in the love of kreplach and blintzis for their own sake.

Simchas Torah is therefore radically different. The joy, singing and dancing with the Torah that accompanies the conclusion of the reading of the Torah is overtly an expression of love, joy and excitement for G-d's Torah. Here, both the fact that it is a custom and the manner of which the custom manifests itself, it is an outpouring of unmitigated love and joy. This, in turn, elicits a reciprocal response of unadulterated love and joy from G-d.

But it doesn't end there.

A Virtuous Cycle

Once G-d expresses His unabashed "pleasure" and "joy" in response to ours, we, in turn, intuitively sense G-d's "unbounded joy," and reciprocate by adding even more joy to our celebration. And when G-d sees how we sensed and responded to His joy, which came initially because of our unsolicited joy, that generates an even greater Divine reaction of joy. And the cycle continues ad infinitum.

This explains why we express our joy in Simchas Torah by dancing in circles, referred to as *Hakafos*. Just as a circuit around the *Bimah* has no end, so too the joy that we generated has no end, for each measure of joy that we exhibit elicits a greater level of Divine joy, which, in turn, elicits more joy from us.

The Dance of the Future

There is a Biblical and Talmudic reference to a dance in the future Messianic Age. This dance is said to be in a circle. The circle symbolizes the infinite joy that we will experience in the Messianic Era. We can all savor a taste of that joy when we participate in the Simchas Torah dancing.

There are two ways we can prepare for the future Messianic Age. The first is to sit back and wait for G-d to do what He promised to do and bring us the final redemption. If G-d tells us, as He has in the Torah, to perform certain Mitzvos that will hasten the Redemption, such as giving Tzedakah, we do it. There is no question that it will be accepted by G-d favorably and bring about the final Redemption.

However, there is a second approach to our preparation for the Redemption. When we look for original ways of doing good and exult in the belief that the Redemption is

imminent, that spontaneous and unsolicited reaction to the future is in the mold and mode of Simchas Torah, where both the initiative and the manner in which the initiative manifests are expressions of joy and love. G-d will certainly respond in kind with unrestricted joy and love that will break through all the boundaries of exile so that we initiate the "virtuous cycle" of unfiltered love and joy; dancing all the way to the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the Third Temple!

ESSAY ELEVEN

TWO TIERED UNITY

To express the idea of unity where the lowest becomes the highest, we express our joy through dance.

When we dance, it is the feet that raise the head to higher levels, because the feet possess a quality that even the head does not have.

To exemplify the level of unity that transcends division altogether, we dance in circuits.

Just as in a circle there is no beginning and no end, so too there is no beginning and end to our Jewishness, our community, and our relationship to Torah and G-d.

ESSAY ELEVEN

TWO TIERED UNITY

Why all the Dancing?

Every Holiday has its special Mitzvah. On Rosh Hashanah it is the sounding of the shofar. On Passover it is the eating of Matzah. During Sukkot it is dwelling in the Sukkah. On Simchas Torah the central mitzvah is *Hakafos*, which literally means "circuits" and it refers to the dancing with the Torah around the *bimah*.

On the surface, the reason for the dancing on Simchas Torah is to rejoice as we complete the annual cycle of Torah reading. But if that is the reason for the dancing one can ask two questions:

First, why is the emphasis placed on dancing? Why not emphasize the singing or other manifestations of joy?

Second, why the emphasis on *Hakafos*-the circling of the *bimah* with the Torah, as we dance? What difference is there if we dance in a circle or in a straight line?

The Common Strand

To answer these two questions it is necessary to see the thread that runs through all of the Holidays of the month of *Tishrei*, from Rosh Hashanah through Simchas Torah.

The common theme of all these Holidays is unity. And it all begins with the Torah reading that immediately precedes Rosh Hashanah:

> "You stand firmly today, all of you, before G-d your G-d. Your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel; your small children, your women, and your convert who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water."

The word "today" in the foregoing verse is said to refer to Rosh Hashanah, and the declaration of unity stated here refers to the unity of Rosh Hashanah.

On Rosh Hashanah all classes of Jews from the leaders to the simplest folk stand in judgment before G-d and will be victorious in their judgment because they all stand together.

The theme of unity continues of Yom Kippur, the day that is designated by the Torah as "the singular day of the year."

It is a day of singularity, when the essence of our souls is exposed, in relation to which we are all one.

The Sukkah that embraces whoever is in it equally also symbolizes unity.

The Four Kinds (Lulav-Palm branch, Etrog, Myrtles, Willows) that we recite the blessing over during this holiday, according to the Midrash, represents four disparate classes of Jews who are all brought together in unity during Sukkot.

When we rejoice ecstatically with the Torah on Simchas Torah we take the ideal of unity to a crescendo. All classes within the Jewish community unify to rejoice with the Torah. We do not celebrate our knowledge of the Torah; we celebrate our spiritual connection to it, in relation to which we are all equal.

Two Distinct Levels of Unity

Upon closer examination we can see how the dancing with the Torah in circuits on Simchas Torah actually exemplifies two distinct levels of unity.

When we list the various hierarchical levels within the community from the heads to the simplest, we must recognize that the "lowest" and least sophisticated level of

the community possesses an advantage that even the head does not possess.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of the Chabad movement, in his *Likkutei Torah* explains this level of unity by way of an analogy to the human body. It is clear that the head is superior to the feet. However, in some respects, the feet are more important than the head. After all, the feet will transport the entire person, including his head, to places the head could not possibly reach on its own. In some respects, therefore, the feet are actually the "head" of the whole person.

Similarly, with respect to the Jewish people: While there are those souls that are clearly head and shoulders above the rest of us, there are certain qualities that the "feet" souls possess that render them the "head" of all other souls.

But, this level of unity assumes the existence of legitimate divisions in our community. It is just that sometimes that which is recognized as being on the lowest rung can actually be on the highest.

The Rebbe explains at length that there is another level of unity. This is the level of unity where there is no division whatsoever. There is no head and no foot. All of us are truly inherently one.

Dancing in Circles Parallel Two Firms of Unity

On Simchas Torah we experience both of these levels of unity.

To express the idea of unity where the lowest becomes the highest, we express our joy through dance. When we dance, it is the feet that raise the head to higher levels, because the feet possess a quality that even the head does not have.

To exemplify the level of unity that transcends division altogether, we dance in circuits. Just as in a circle there is no beginning and no end, so too there is no beginning and end to our Jewishness, our community, and our relationship to Torah and G-d.

Dancing in Circles: Messianic Phenomenon

In one of the Messianic prophecies, the image of a dance that G-d will make for the righteous is employed.

The deeper meaning is that in the Messianic Age the unity of G-d will be fully revealed. This unity will expose the unity within each and every one of us so that we will all dance in and endless circle to celebrate the revelation of the infinite glory of the one G-d, who pervades all of existence.

In the Messianic Age we will experience true unity that manifests itself in two ways. We will see the virtue in the "feet" Jews; the ones who serve G-d with simple sincerity; that they uplift all of us. And we will also experience the higher level of unity in which we are all equal. We get a taste of that every Simchas Torah.

ESSAY TWELVE

DANCING INTO THE WORLD OF MOSHIACH!

We are living in unique times.

We are—despite our shortcomings as individuals—the most spiritually unique generation as well.

In addition to the cumulative effect of all the generations before us, our generation has been given unique challenges.

For better or for worse, we have met these challenges and we, as a nation, have everything of which to be proud.

ESSAY TWELVE

DANCING INTO THE WORLD OF MOSHIACH!

Moses: The Man of G-d and the one who Blessed Israel

The Torah concludes with the parsha called "*Beracha*"—the parsha that we read on Simchas Torah—which means blessing. Indeed, this parsha contains Moses' final talk to the Jewish people in which he blesses each of the twelve tribes.

The Midrash states that Moses is referred to here as "the man of G-d." Nowhere else is this appellation used to describe Moses. The Midrash asserts that only after he blessed Israel did he receive this title.

Several questions come to mind:

First, why is it that Moses did not acquire this title "man of G-d" until he blessed the Jewish people?

This question is especially strong in light of the fact that Moses had a direct line to G-d and it was through Moses that G-d performed all the miracles of the Exodus, and

most notably, Moses was the one through whom the Torah was given to the Jewish people. Indeed, in this week's parsha Moses is described as the commander of the Torah: "The Torah which Moses commanded us is an inheritance for the assembly of Jacob." Why then did he not earn the title "man of G-d" previously, considering his unparalleled closeness to G-d.

Second, if blessing the Jewish people carried so much weight and accorded Moses this unprecedented title "man of G-d," why did he wait until the end of his life to bless the Jewish people?

The Anatomy of a Blessing

The answer to these questions lies in a better understanding of the nature of these blessings. Blessings, especially from a G-dly person, are not just an expression of one's good wishes for another. And while expressing good wishes to another is commendable because it demonstrates closeness and positive feelings for the other it does not capture the essence of a blessing.

A blessing is the means by which we enable the other to realize their full potential.

Removing Roadblocks and Discovering New Vistas

However, our potential changes from day to day. When we live a vacuous life and fail to capitalize on our potential, we place roadblocks on our own road to realizing that potential in the future. We now need more than the standard blessing to actualize our potential. We now possess a new—greatly reduced potential.

Conversely, when we make the right choices in life and especially when we instill our souls with more G-dly energy through the observance of G-dly Mitzvos, we open up new vistas of spiritual opportunity. And paradoxically two changes occur:

On the one hand, we do not need as much of a blessing to assist us to realize our original potential, but, on the other hand, we need a more potent blessing to reach the new, uncharted reservoirs of G-dly energy that were made available due to our positive choices.

A New Order of Blessing

With this introduction we can understand why Moses waited to bless the Jewish people until the last day of his life.

There is no question that Moses, as a "faithful shepherd" was continually inspiring and blessing his people. However, the blessings we read about in this week's parsha are qualitatively of a different order.

At this point in Moses' life he saw the progress his generation had made as a people, notwithstanding all of the negative things that transpired previously. Indeed, Moses acknowledges their progress in a previous parsha where he describes how after forty years they finally realized the full import of what they've been taught at Sinai.

Moses now had to give them a completely new and more potent blessing commensurate with their new potential and mission for the future as a people who were poised to enter into the Holy Land.

This was to be the beginning of a journey that would last them for the next 3,000 years until the coming of Moshiach. At this juncture, Moses had to elicit the most G-dly aspects of his soul to give them an unprecedented blessing.

Hence Moses was now given the title "a man of G-d" because at no time before had Moses needed to elicit his own G-dly power as he did now. His blessing was going to determine the future of the Jewish people for all times.

Are We the Lowliest Generation of the Highest?

We are living in unique times. There are many who look askance at our generation. Some see our generation as the lowliest of all times considering all the negative phenomena that we have witnessed in the most recent years.

In truth, the Rebbe has asserted on many an occasion that we are—despite our shortcomings as individuals—the most spiritually unique generation as well.

In addition to the cumulative effect of all the generations before us, our generation has been given unique challenges. For better or for worse, we have met these challenges and we, as a nation, have everything of which to be proud.

However, the very fact that we are so spiritually advanced suggests that we have new and unprecedented potential and challenges that goes way beyond that which we had in the past. And to meet these new challenges we need new inspiration and blessings.

We are, as our ancestors in Moses' time, poised to enter into the Messianic Age, and for that we need and have received unique blessings.

Indeed, our generation has been fortunate that we have merited the leadership and inspiration of the Rebbe, who like Moses, has given us his G-dly blessings, enabling us to

be aware of the new challenge and the wherewithal to meet it.

Cumulative Joy

This Simchas Torah, we will dance with the Torah and rejoice even more than we did in the first eight days of the Holiday, despite the fact that Simchas Torah is only a rabbinical holiday and the extensive dancing and celebration on this day "merely" a Jewish custom. One might have thought that the culmination of the Holiday is when the joy wanes and its significance is diminished.

In truth, Simchas Torah we have the cumulative joy and inspiration from the preceding eight days, plus its own unique brand of spiritual joy. Just as the last generation of exile seems to be the lowliest but in actuality has the greatest potential, similarly, Simchas Torah provides us with the greatest potential for it is blessed by Moses, whose perennial blessings we will read on Simchas Torah.

Our task now is to recognize the incredible challenge to be joyous on this Holiday and to "imbibe" the spiritually intoxicating forces that will give us the strength and stamina to dance into the world of Moshiach!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

RESTORING THE LIGHT

Kadish must be recited with a Minyan.

Kadish is cognate to the world kedusha, holiness and connotes a level of Divine energy that is detached from our realm of reality and accessibility.

An individual cannot break out of his own reality and grasp something beyond his reach.

Groups of ten—that represent the totality of the Jewish people—forms a new reality that is receptive to the otherness of G-d's light generated by the kadish, Kedusha and the reading of the Torah.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

RESTORING THE LIGHT

Who Wrote the Last Eight Verses?

This parsha marks the end of the Five Books of Moses. And the end of the parsha—its last eight verses—describes poignantly the passing of Moses.

The Talmud (*Bava Basra* 15a) deals with the obvious question. The entire Torah was written by Moses. How then could Moses have reported his own passing, burial and eulogy?

The Talmud provides two answers, represented by two Talmudic Sages. According to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah (according to another version it was Rabbi Nechemia) it was actually Joshua who penned these last eight verses and not Moses. Rabbi Shimon demurs and argues:

> Is it possible that the Torah should be missing one letter? Does it not say, "Take this Book of Torah"

> [implying that Moses had already completed the entire book]?"

Rather, Rabbi Shimon maintains Moses did in fact write these last eight verses. The only difference is that these verses Moses did not verbalize and that he wrote them with tears.

Practical Application

The Talmud then applies a practical ruling to these final eight verses:

> "One individual reads these verses."

Rashi explains that this means that it means that these eight verses cannot be split up into two sections to be read by two individuals. Thus, the meaning of "one individual reads these verses" should actually be interpreted as "all these verses should be read as one."

Maimonides has a different way of interpreting these words: Since these verses were not transmitted in the same manner as the rest of the Torah (either because they were written by Joshua or that Moses wrote them with tears), one does not need a minyan (a quorum of ten men needed for the public reading of the Torah) to read these verses. They may be read even by an individual.

We must try to understand why these last verses would be considered inferior to the other verses of the Torah, since they are an integral part of the Torah. If even one letter of these last eight verses would be missing or written defectively it would invalidate the entire Torah. Why then could it be read by an individual in contradistinction to all the other parts of the Torah which require a minyan?

We also have to understand Rashi's approach that these eight verses must be read without interruption, why would the fact that they were written by Joshua or that they were written with tears warrant not splitting up the reading into two parts?

The Filtering Process

To resolve the foregoing it is necessary to understand the two views as to whether Joshua wrote the last eight verses or it was written by Moses with tears.

Either scenario suggests that these last verses of the Torah were meant to link the exalted state of Moses' generation and the generations to follow, which were of a lower level. Moses knew that future generations will need to have the powerful G-dly forces that the Torah generates condensed to make them accessible.

According to the Rebbe (see *Toras Menachem*, 5749 p. 43) the entire story of Moses' passing is more than a description of the departure of his soul from his body in the classical sense of death. Moses' death is actually a process where he allows for his brilliant light to be "diminished." In this regard the Rebbe cites the Zohar: "One who falls from their level is called dead."

Based on this analysis, one way of understanding Moses' death/decline was his allowing for his intense light to be filtered.

However, there are two ways the transition can be made between Moses' era and subsequent ones. In one scenario Moses' light is reflected through Joshua and his teachings. Our Sages compare Moses to the light of the sun and Joshua his successor to the reflective light of the moon. There is nothing altered or introduced from a foreign source. True, the radiance is dimmed for it is only reflected light, but the moon does not reflect anything but the light of the sun, and Joshua reflected faithfully all the light that Moses radiated..

Moses, therefore, allows for the Torah to be completed by his successor. By doing so, Moses was able to link his own stature—since these last eight verses written by Joshua were incorporated within the corpus of the Five Book of

Moses—with that of the more accessible approach of Joshua, who actually write these last eight verses.

Self-Limitation

Rabbi Shimon, however, provides for another solution to the problem as to who wrote the last eight verses. It is axiomatic that the Five Books of Moses are unique even in comparison with the other Biblical books because they are the product of G-d's communication with the most transparent receptacle—Moses.

Rabbi Shimon therefore adopts the second scenario, in which Moses writes the words of the Torah, but it is written with tears. By writing it himself, the light that emerged from these letters were not merely reflected light. These were Moses words, albeit in a form that differed from the rest of the Torah.

According to some, writing with tears means that he used tears instead of ink to form the letters. Another interpretation understands it literally that as he was writing he shed tears. This was an indication that Moses was undergoing a transformation that represented the first stage in the process of "death." Either way, Moses, in his last eight verses of narrative, was "diminishing" himself.

Moses recognized that a transition had to occur. But to preserve the integrity of the Torah even that transition had to be ascribed to Moses himself and not even to his trusted disciple Joshua. When a person limits himself, for example, it is not the same as when he is limited and reflected by others.

Minyan Power

We can now understand why these eight verses are different in regard to reading them in public. Since, these last eight verses constitute the bridge between the Five Books of Moses and the rest of the Torah revealed to future generations, the Torah's radiance is somewhat concealed. When we read the preceding parts of the Torah that reveal the intense G-dly light that characterizes Moses' writing, we must have a minyan to absorb that light. Only a collective body of people has the capacity to experience that intense light without being overwhelmed.

This explains why Kadish and other prayers cannot be recited by individuals except within the context of a minyan. The word kadish is cognate to the world kedusha, holiness. More precisely it connotes a level of Divine energy that is detached from our realm of reality and accessibility. An individual cannot break out of his own reality and grasp something beyond his reach. Groups of ten—that represent

the totality of the Jewish people—forms a new reality that is receptive to the otherness of G-d's light generated by the kadish, other prayers and the reading of the Torah.

By contrast, the diminished or filtered light generated by the eight last verses are indeed within reach of each and every individual as an individual.

No Pause Necessary or Desirable

We can also understand Rashi's contention that these eight verses are singled out that they must be read without interruption. The reason for the interruptions in the Torah, Rashi tell us, was to give Moses time to reflect on and digest the words of G-d that were spoken to/through him. This was necessary because of the transcendent nature of these G-dly teachings.

The last eight verses, however, do not require the pauses because they were tailor made for those who were/ are on a lower level. The pauses are not only unnecessary, they can be detrimental. When we take something straightforward and uncomplicated and we dissect it and parse it too much it can actually cause its true meaning to be adulterated and distorted. Or, to use another analogy, when a potent drink is diluted with water it makes the

drink drinkable. If however, the drink is already drinkable and water is added to it, it ruins its taste.

New Light

The transition from Moses to Joshua and subsequent generations wherein the radiance of Torah had to be dimmed was not a permanent situation. As we prepare for Moshiach and the final Redemption we are told that the process will actually be reversed. The Biblical prediction that "A new Torah shall emerge from Me," (Isaiah 51:4; Midrash, Rabbah, Vayikra 13:3) is understood to mean that the same Torah we have now and we will have for all eternity will have its full radiance restored.

Moreover, even new dimensions that were contained subliminally in the Torah that were given to Moses but not able to be revealed even then, will also emerge from G-d through the teachings of Moshiach, The full potency and radiance of the light of Torah will be manifest for all.

Indeed, since the Ba'al Shem Tov and the emergence of the Chassidic movement with the innovative teachings of Chassidus we were afforded a foretaste of this new light of Torah.

If someone were to ask, why didn't the great Sages of earlier years have access to this knowledge, the answer can be found in the last eight verses of the Torah. The radiant teachings of Moses were concealed even from the generation that immediately followed Moses' generation. However, as we approach the Messianic Age, G-d allows for some of the hitherto concealed precincts of Torah to be revealed; and revealed to all across the spiritual spectrum.

The objective is to prepare us for the time when the light of Torah will shine totally unobstructed and when all that was utterly hidden from us will be in full view of all.

At that time, the tears Moses shed to allow for the Torah to become accessible to all of us will be erased together with the tears that we have shed throughout our long stay in exile. We will experience unmitigated joy!

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TORAH: RIGHT AND LEFT

Torah can combine opposite traits and forces and create a beautiful mosaic.

Torah is essentially beyond all form. It is G-d's utter delight that transcends all of existence.

It therefore has the power to manifest itself in any number of colors and notes. It can be on the right and it can be on the left.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TORAH: RIGHT AND LEFT

Water and Fire

On Simchas Torah we conclude the reading of the Torah by concluding the last parsha entitled Beracha. Since this is the very last parsha of the Torah it stands to reason that it would convey to us some of the unique qualities of the Torah. Moreover, since we read this parsha on the day of Simchas Torah, when we dance with the Torah to express our boundless joy and ecstasy for the Torah, it follows that we should discover some of what makes Torah so unique and precious in this Torah reading.

And indeed, at the very beginning of the parsha we read: "From His right He gave them a fiery law."

Torah is thus described as possessing an element of the "right" as well as the character of fire, which in the lexicon of Kabbalah is identified with the left.

Right and left are metaphors for G-d's kindness and judgment, respectively.

In other Torah sources, the Torah is likened to water. This is consistent with the description of the Torah here because water is identified with the trait of kindness since it is what sustains all of life. In addition, water flows downward, replicating the downward flow of Divine beneficence to us in our lowly physical existence. And there can be no greater kindness than to allow us to share in is wisdom.

Hence, Torah is said to be unique in that it combines both the right and the left; water and fire.

This combination is further echoed in the Biblical description of the Torah as coming "from *shamayim*, the heaven," the simple meaning of which is that the Torah is Divine. However, the Chassidic interpretation of this phrase is that Torah derives from *shamayim*, which is a composite of the two words *aish* and *mayim*, fire and water, left and right.

Synthesis

Why is this synthesis of right and left so significant as to be the way the Torah describes itself at this crucial juncture?

The answer lies in the Talmud's description of Torah as *tiferes. Tiferes* or beauty is the idea of synthesis. It represents the beauty that exists in harmony and symphony. It is the mixture of different hues and colors.

The reason Torah can combine opposite traits and forces and create this beautiful mosaic is because Torah is essentially beyond all form. It is G-d's utter delight that transcends all of existence. It therefore has the power to manifest itself in any number of colors and notes. It can be on the right and it can be on the left.

A Chassidic Story

A student of a Chassidic Yeshivah (advanced academic Torah institution) where the mystical dimension of Torah is accentuated spent time in a Yeshivah where the emphasis was on the more exoteric branches of Torah. When he was asked to compare notes he observed that both systems asked the same basic question concerning Torah and reached the same conclusion, but from totally opposite vantage points.

In the non-Chassidic academy the spiritual mentor asked the question how we can say that the Torah is from Heaven. Isn't Torah down-to-earth? Doesn't the Torah deal with mundane affairs of life; utilizing logical arguments to

resolve questions, etc.? How can we then say that it is Divine? The rabbi's conclusion was that notwithstanding the very earthy and rational character of Torah we must concede that within the Torah there is a Divine spark. Torah does indeed come from heaven.

The Chassidic leader asked the "same" question. How can we say that the Torah is from Heaven. Heaven, or *Shamayim*, is a composite of fire and water, which describe the Divine attributes of *chesed*-kindnesss and *gevurah*-judgment. How can we limit and thereby degrade the Torah by applying finite terms of *chesed* and *gevura*h to Torah?

How can we possibly "slot" the Torah into any finite category, which limits its transcendent G-dly nature?

His conclusion, much like the other Sage, was that we have to concede, that indeed, Torah, notwithstanding its transcendent nature, does manifest itself within the parameters of the attributes of kindness and judgment, thereby making it accessible to our minds and relevant to our lives. G-d in His infinite kindness allowed His Torah to be accessed by us through the various forms it embodies.

Dancing with a Closed Torah

On Simchas Torah, we do not dance with the open Torah. We do not even open it to the above discussed verse that extols the virtue of Torah that possesses this incredible synthesis. We dance with a closed Torah, Why?

On Simchas Torah we do not even focus on the aspect of Torah that synthesizes right and left. On Simchas Torah we relate to the aspect of Torah that transcends all of its parameters that empowers the synthesis. Simchas Torah connects us to the essence of Torah, which is connected to G-d's very Essence.

On the Essence of Torah

The Rebbe explains in one of his landmark discourses "On the Essence of Chassidus" that while all of Torah is Divine, there are different levels of Torah that are cloaked in a "garment" that defines it and that is "limited" to that particular form.

Chassidus, however, is the essence of Torah that has no fixed form. It is Divine wisdom revealed in recent times as a preparation for the Torah that Moshiach will reveal. This aspect of Torah defies form and can therefore manifest itself in all of the different forms of Torah.

And it is this dimension of Torah that is most closely identified with the dancing of Simchas Torah and which will be fully revealed by Moshiach.

When we dance with the closed Torah on Simchas Torah, we should imagine that this is a foretaste of the Torah with which we will rejoice when Moshiach reveals to us the hitherto most secret knowledge of Torah—its very essence.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE END!

Moses, our Sages tell us, was the first redeemer and he will also be the final redeemer.

Moshiach's soul will be energized by Moses' soul. Moshiach will "appropriate" Moses' traits and thus be empowered to take us out of exile.

Moshiach, like Moses, does everything in his power to ensure that the Torah reaches every Jew regardless of their level of observance.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE END!

G-d's Eulogy for Moses

There is Talmudic saying, "Everything follows the end." This statement suggests that the end of a subject sums up the entire subject. This is especially true with respect to a Divine text such as the Torah.

With this introduction in mind, let us reflect on the very last verse of the Torah which is G-d's eulogy for Moses who has just passed away. The last few verses describe Moses as the greatest prophet that ever lived. This is followed in the penultimate verse with his praise as the one whom G-d sent to perform great miracles in Egypt. However, the very last verse describes his "strong hand" and the "great awe that Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel."

What is the meaning of his "strong hand" and what was the "awesome" act that he performed before the eyes of all Israel"?

Rashi explains that this verse actually describes three separate feats of Moses:

First, he displayed his strong hand; the hand with which he received the Torah.

Second, he performed miracles and displayed power in the great and awesome desert.

Third, he shattered the tablets in the presence of all Israel.

Each one of these three items raises questions.

The Four Questions

First, it is difficult to comprehend why Moses' strong hand was needed to receive the Torah? And if it means literally that the Tablets were quite heavy and that Moses possessed the physical power to carry them, why would that be listed as Moses' praise; the praise that was selected by G-d with which to conclude the Torah?

Second, it is difficult to understand why the miracles that were performed in the desert are mentioned separately from the miracles that he performed in Egypt that was just mentioned in the preceding verse?

Third, what was so spectacular and positive about his shattering of the tablets? True, Rashi anticipated this

question and added that G-d condoned his action and actually exclaimed, "Well done that you broke them." However, the question remains, couldn't something more positive about Moses have been said in the climax of G-d's eulogy for history's greatest human being?

Fourth, how do all these three things link together: Moses strong hand, miracles in the desert and his shattering of the Tablets?

Tug-of-War

To answer all these questions let us quote the words of the Jerusalem Talmud (*Ta'anis* 4:5) on this verse:

> Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman stated in the name of Rabbi Yonason: "The tablets were six handbreadths long and three handbreadths wide. Moses was holding on to two of the handbreadths and G-d [holding on to the other] two, leaving two in the middle.
>
> When Israel committed that act [construction of the Golden calf], G-d sought to seize them from Moses' hand. Moses' hand overpowered [G-d's hand] and he seized it from Him.

> This is what Scripture says in his praise: 'And all the strength of his hand.' May there be peace to the hand that overpowered G-d's right hand."

This strange "tug-of-war" scenario between G-d and Moses represents the first description of Moses' greatest power. That Moses was able to perform miracles in Egypt is secondary to his ability to "wrest" the Torah from G-d. To perform a miracle he had to be "merely" a transparent vehicle for G-d's power. By simply carrying out G-d's instructions Moses was able to channel G-d's supernatural ability to crush Pharaoh and compel him to let the Jewish people go.

This explains, why the Haggadah states that G-d did everything exclusively: "I, and not an emissary." How does this reconcile with Moses' very prominent role in the Exodus?

The answer is that Moses was a self-effacing, passive recipient of Divine power. Everything that happened was G-d's exclusive work that was merely channeled through him, the way our voices are channeled through a loud speaker.

Moses' passive role ended with the giving of the Torah. When G-d attempted to withdraw the Tablets in response to the Jewish people's transgression, Moses clearly "challenged" G-d and won!

Obviously, Moses could not go against G-d's will. G-d however manifests Himself on different levels. One could challenge a lower manifestation of G-d's power by connecting to a higher and more elusive dimension of His power. G-d's right hand, with which He gave the Tablets, is a metaphor for G-d's attribute of kindness. It is a reflection of the Torah's "ways of pleasantness" and "paths of peace."

But kindness, even G-d's kindness, is but a level of the Divine that is cloaked in a "vessel" that defines and therefore limits the infinite Divine power.

That Moses overpowered G-d's right hand means that Moses accessed a more powerful manifestation of Divine power that is characterized as His "mighty hand."

Even if G-d's "conventional" kindness said "no" to giving the Torah to the Jewish people after they had degenerated into the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses invoked G-d's elusive, infinite power of kindness. Moses struggled to access this level of kindness as well by digging deep into his own hidden level of consciousness. Once he revealed G-d's unmitigated kindness there was nothing that could stand in the way of giving the Torah even to the creators of the Golden Calf.

Great and Awesome Desert

This initiative of Moses was followed by an even more exalted manifestation of G-d's power that he accessed. "He performed miracles in a "great and awesome desert."

Not only was Moses able to seize the Torah on behalf of sinners, he performed miracles for them despite their recalcitrant behavior throughout their stay in the desert.

That Moses would be G-d's instrument to miraculously provide the Jews with all of their needs despite their many rebellious acts in the desert is a greater testament to Moses' extraordinary stature, surpassing even his role as the liberator of his people from Egyptian bondage.

This may be hinted in the way Rashi applies the terms "great and awesome" to the desert. A desert is a metaphor for a spiritually hostile environment and an "awesome" desert is an exceedingly hostile environment. And yet, Moses performed all these wonders and displayed extraordinary strength and dedication to his people.

Moses' Ultimate Praise

This too still does not capture the full extent of Moses' greatness. It is followed by his ultimate praise—that he shattered the tablets!

In the first instance—where Moses won the "tug-of-war" with G-d—Moses fought to get the Torah to the Jewish people despite their unworthiness.

In the second scenario—where he performed miracles for them in the great and awesome desert—Moses performed miracles for them despite their continual rebelliousness.

In both situations, Moses fought for his people but not at his expense. Moses lost nothing by procuring the Torah and performing miracles for them. Indeed, Moses accessed, and connected to, a more transcendent aspect of G-d to achieve these goals. Moses' spiritual stature was enhanced. He had the Torah and he fought for his people.

The last feat—the shattering of the tablets—destroyed that which was most precious to him to save the Jewish people from destruction.

The Rebbe explains that Moses was willing to forgo his most spiritual possession for the sake of his people. The irony here is that Moses first fought to give them the Torah, and then when he realized that they were in danger of receiving harsh retribution for having so blatantly violated the commandments, Moses made a U-turn and broke the tablets. By doing so, our Sages tell us, he annulled the contract between the Jewish people and G-d and thereby averted a catastrophe.

In these three areas Moses demonstrated that he would do anything to give the Jews Torah and all of their needs and that he would ultimately even sacrifice his most precious possession and his highest spiritual achievements for their survival.

Moses and Moshiach

Moses, our Sages tell us, was the first redeemer and he will also be the final redeemer. This does not suggest that Moses will actually be the Moshiach. Rather, Moshiach's soul will be energized by Moses' soul. Put another way: Moshiach will "appropriate" Moses' traits and thus be empowered to take us out of exile.

Moshiach, we are told is revealed while the Jewish people are still in exile. And even before the actual Redemption occurs Moshiach—behind the scenes—wages war, with his spiritual power, against the enemies of the Jewish people. In this scenario he emulates Moses's efforts in miraculously bringing the plagues upon Egypt.

But this does not capture the essence of Moshiach's accomplishments. Moshiach, like Moses, does everything in his power to ensure that the Torah reaches every Jew regardless of their level of observance. Whereas in the past, there were some who looked askance at assimilated Jews

and denied them Torah knowledge, Moshiach brings Torah to every Jew regardless of his or her level of observance. Moreover, Moshiach seeks out every Jew to provide him or her with Torah.

Moshiach is not content with bringing conventional knowledge of Torah to every Jew. Moshiach, like Moses before him, "wrests" the most precious parts of Torah—i.e., the mystical and inner dimension of Torah that was off limits even to most righteous in the past—from G-d, so to speak, and makes it accessible to every Jew. Moshiach then performs the greatest wonders for even those Jews who are identified with the great and awesome desert; Jews who are totally lost in exile.

Finally, and arguably, Moshiach's greatest virtue is his willingness to sacrifice his own spiritual achievements and put aside his own assiduous study of Torah, his first love, to save a Jew who may have rejected all of its teachings.

Moshiach, like Moses, is a living Torah scroll, nay a Tablet, in whom the words of the Torah are etched and inseparable from them. Yet, when the well-being of a Jew is at stake, Moshiach is willing to shatter his own Tablets, i.e., take off time from his own Torah study and spiritual advancement to help another Jew materially and spiritually.

The above is applicable to each and every Jew since as Chassidic thought tells us we all possess a spark of both

Moses and Moshiach. We can therefore emulate them and bring the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE TORAH CELEBRATES WITH US

Simchas Torah has a twin meaning: We rejoice with the Torah and the Torah rejoices with us.

We rejoice with the Torah because the Torah informs us about our obligations and instills meaning in our lives.

We rejoice with the Torah because it tells us how our souls' connection to G-d actually transcends the connection of G-d to the Torah.

The Torah is also ecstatic because through our attachment to it we infuse it with new vitality, vigor and Divine energy.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE TORAH CELEBRATES WITH US

The Torah Reading Cycle of the Ba'al Teshuvah

The annual Torah reading cycle revolves around the Festival of Sukkos-Simchas Torah. On Simchas Torah we conclude the fifth and final book of the Torah and soon after we begin anew with *Bereisis*-Genesis.

The question has been asked, why the Torah cycle coincides with Sukkos and Simchas Torah rather than with the Festival of Shavuos which is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai?

The classic answer is that Sukkos and Simchas Torah are the joyous culmination of Yom Kippur, the day we received the second set of tablets. This event represented the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people after they repented for their egregious sin of worshipping the golden calf. Yom Kippur thus represents a renewed and reinvigorated giving of the Torah. The cycle of Torah reading becomes a more poignant experience when it follows the giving of the Torah

to a nation that has returned to G-d and internalized the lessons of the Torah.

Beginning the new cycle of Torah reading in the aftermath of Yom Kippur reinforces the opinion in the Talmud that a person who returns to G-d, the *Ba'al Teshuvah*, is superior to the Jew who has never sinned, the *Tzadik*. Thus, the Torah reading that is linked to the Ba'al Teshuvah carries more weight than the Torah reading that is associated with the *Tzadik*.

There is still a need for further clarification. If we consider the status of the performance of a Mitzvah, we can easily comprehend why the Mitzvah performed by one who has returned to its practice surpasses the Mitzvah performed by one who was always faithful to it. One can appreciate the notion that one who embraces a Mitzvah after having shunned it demonstrates a greater measure of intensity and conviction. However, here we are discussing the reading of the Torah. What specific advantage is there when a *Ba'al Teshuvah* reads the Torah over the reading of a *Tzadik*?

Furthermore, if the Torah reading cycle is connected to Yom Kippur, why do we wait until Simchas Torah—after the Holiday of Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres--to conclude the reading of the Torah and commence again the cycle of the annual Torah reading with Bereishis?

The Two Dimensions of the Torah –Israel Relationship

Chassidic thought discerns two aspects in our relationship with Torah [and Torah's relationship with us.]

First, in the more classic sense, the Torah links us to G-d, its Giver. In the words of the Zohar: "There are three knots. Israel is bound to the Torah and Torah is bound with G-d." We need to be bound to the Torah in order to connect to G-d. Even though we possess a G-dly soul, we cannot maintain a vibrant relationship with G-d without the Torah.

The rationale for this is that our G-dly souls exist within the confining parameters of the physical world, our bodies and the influence of our Animal Soul. The Torah, by contrast, is unfettered G-dly wisdom, and is therefore free from all of these worldly constraints and obstructive influences. Torah can, therefore, connect us to the Divine. We depend on the Torah to facilitate our relationship with G-d.

In the second aspect of our relationship, the Torah depends on us to elevate it spiritually. There is a part of us that is spiritually superior to Torah and, by our Torah study, we instill a Higher Divine energy into the Torah. The Torah depends on us to enhance its relationship with G-d's essence.

Chassidic thought explains that the soul exists on two planes. There is the soul that is cloaked within our bodies and is subject to the limits imposed on it by the body, and there is the part of the soul that transcends the body and can never be sullied or constrained. It is this aspect of the soul that is so inextricably bound with G-d that it even transcends the Divine manifestation within the Torah. We can refer to these two dimensions of the soul as the "Inner Soul" and the Outer Soul."

Connecting to Our Outer Soul through Teshuvah

How do we express the "Outer Soul"? How do we "break out" of the constraints of our existence to access the soul's essential energy – the energy that transcends the Divine contained within the Torah?

One answer is through Teshuvah. By returning to G-d, G-d unleashes the powerful soul energy that heals all of the breaches that were caused by our transgressions. The relationship with G-d that is dependent on and effected through the observance of the Mitzvos has been damaged.

On a lower level, Teshuvah merely repairs the damage, but the relationship is not as strong as it was before the transgression.

On the higher level of Teshuvah, the one associated with Yom Kippur, a new relationship is generated based on the "Outer Soul's" connection to G-d, which can never be damaged or weakened.

Thus, after Yom Kippur, when we return to G-d and experience the deeper and unconventional dimension of our relationship with G-d, we then are empowered to endow our Torah reading-study with unconventional Divine power.

We can now understand why we wait for Yom Kippur to start the Torah reading cycle. It is to instill a more sublime Divine energy into the Torah, which we can only do after experiencing a heightened level of our souls.

A question still remains, why do we not start the reading of the Torah immediately after Yom Kippur? Why do we wait until after Sukkos?

The Yom Kippur Sukkos, Shemini Atzeres, Simchas Torah Continuum

Sukkos, Chassidic thought teaches us, is not independent of Yom Kippur. Whatever transcendent spiritual energies we generate on Yom Kippur have to be internalized within our normal faculties without compromising the sublime nature

of these energies. They have to touch and affect our intellect and our emotions. Ultimately, the spiritual energies must even reach our legs and feet. The goal is for our entire being to be engulfed in the light of Yom Kippur.

If Yom Kippur is the day when our deepest soul connection with G-d is revealed, Sukkos is the time when we feel the enveloping warmth and joy of that energy. Sukkos is the Divine embrace. If Sukkos would have been any other time of the year, it would have involved an embrace of a far less sublime aspect of G-d. After Yom Kippur, the embrace is at its peak.

However, the Sukkah, with all of its spiritual energy, remains an external force. It is therefore complemented by the taking of the Four Species (Lulav-Date Palm, Esrog-Citron, Hadassim-Myrtles, Aravos-Willows), waving them in all six directions and then clutching them to our heart. With this Mitzvah, we enable this Divine energy to come into all facets of our lives until it penetrates our hearts and affects our emotions.

It is no wonder that Sukkos is such a joyous holiday. Surely, there is no greater joy than to discover and experience our soul's deepest connection with G-d.

However, the climax of this process is Shemini Atzeres when, as the Kabbalists put it, "conception" takes place. The seeds of Divine energy take root and are now fully

internalized within every part of our being to the extent that it has even reached our feet. They cannot stay put to the ground and we dance uncontrollably with the Torah.

We can now appreciate how commencing reading the Torah on Simchas Torah is not just starting another cycle of a ritual; it is introducing a new energy into the Torah.

The Simchas Torah Twins

Hence Simchas Torah has a twin meaning: We rejoice with the Torah and the Torah rejoices with us. We rejoice with the Torah because the Torah informs us about our obligations and instills meaning in our lives. Moreover, we rejoice with the Torah because it tells us how our souls' connection to G-d actually transcends the connection of G-d to the Torah.

And the Torah rejoices with us not only because we have dedicated ourselves to its study but because after Yom Kippur and Sukkos, we are able to realize our essential bond with G-d that transcends the bond with Torah. The Torah is ecstatic because through our attachment to it we infuse it with new vitality, vigor and Divine energy.

Simchas Torah thus represents the mutual benefits Torah and Israel receive. We grow through the Torah and the Torah is uplifted through us.

The Moshiach Connection

Of all the Holidays in the month of Tishrei, Simchas Torah stands out as having a special connection to Moshiach. In the hymn that we recite after dancing with the Torah on Simchas Torah day, we mention the fact that Moshiach ("*Tzemach*") shall arrive on Simchas Torah. This does not mean Moshiach cannot come at another time; it merely underscores the conceptual and spiritual relationship between Moshiach and Simchas Torah.

One of the contributions of Moshiach with respect to Torah knowledge will be that he will reveal heretofore dimensions of Torah that were hidden even from Moses. Where will Moshiach receive this unprecedented knowledge that he will impart to the Jewish people?

One answer is that in the Messianic Age, Moshiach will experience the unprecedented opening of all dimensions of his soul. Moshiach's personality is a Simchas Torah personality throughout the year. And Moshiach's soul will radiate new light and depth to the teachings of the Torah.

Moshiach, though, will not keep this Simchas Torah mindset for himself. He will share it with all of us.

One way of preparing for the perpetual Simchas Torah of the future is to truly rejoice and dance with the Torah now with the understanding that we enjoy a reciprocal relationship with the Torah: We rejoice with the Torah ad the Torah rejoices with us!

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

BERACHA – BEREISHIS

The second set of Tablets, did not radiate the same Divine luminescence as the first set.

They were actually intended to empower us to ultimately absorb a higher form of Divine light.

Moses was given and transmitted far more Torah knowledge than he would have received and transmitted had he not shattered the first set of Tablets.

From G-dly concealment ultimately comes greater revelation; one that is both superior and easily internalized.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

BERACHA – BEREISHIS

Before the Eyes of All Israel

On Simchas Torah we read the concluding parsha of the Torah, which describes the passing of Moses and the eulogy G-d delivered for him. In the last three verses, the Torah extols Moses' greatness thus:

> "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom G-d had known face to face, as evidenced by all the signs and wonders G-d sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and all his land, and by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel."

On Simchas Torah we also begin the annual cycle by reading the Torah anew, which starts with the familiar words:

> "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth."

The fact that we follow the reading of the Torah's ending immediately with the reading of its beginning has prompted thousands of explanations that link the end to the beginning. The connection between the text at the end of the Torah and the text at its beginning is well established, being rooted in a principle stated in the ancient Kabbalistic work Sefer Yetzirah:

> "The end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning is wedged in the end."

What connection is there between the wonders that Moses displayed to all of Israel and the opening words of the Torah which describe the Genesis of Creation?

Furthermore, if we examine the deeper meaning of what Moses actually did in the presence of all Israel it would appear to contradict the very idea of creation.

Shattering the Tablets

Rashi explains that the thing Moses did "before the eyes of all Israel" which garnered him such effusive praise from G-d was his shattering of the Tablets. According to our Sages, this act of destruction was not, G-d forbid, a product of reckless anger. Instead, it was an action calculated to save the Jewish people from destruction for their idolatrous sin

of constructing and worshipping the Golden Calf. Moses reasoned that by destroying the "marriage contract" before its delivery, they could not be punished for their infidelity.

Be that as it may, it is clear that Moses committed an act of destruction. How can we suggest that Moses' shattering of the Tablets is thematically connected to the ultimate act of Creation?

Counsel of Youth versus Old Age

The answer can be found in a statement of the Talmud (*Megillah* 31b and *Nedarim* 40a) concerning the difference between the elders' sage advice and the advice of the young.

> "Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar stated: If the young tell you, 'build' and elders tell you 'demolish,' listen to the elders and do not listen to the young, because the building of the young is demolition and the destruction of the elders is building."

Another Talmudic source makes this case even more dramatically:

> "If the young tell you to build the Bais Hamikdash and elders tell you to destroy it, you should destroy it and not build it." (*Tosephta, Avodah Zarah* 1:19)

This tradition is based on the Biblical narrative of a tax revolt in the days of Rechavam, the last King of all the 12 Tribes, son of and successor to King Solomon.

The people complained about their heavy tax burden and the king consulted both his senior and junior advisors. The senior advisors counseled him to lower the taxes, but the junior advisors counseled him to raise them even higher. He chose to follow the junior advisors' advice. As a result 10 of the 12 tribes broke away and formed their own kingdom.

The youthful counsel triggered a cascade of terrible consequences: the division of Israel, constant wars between the two kingdoms, the eventual exile of the Ten Tribes, the destruction of the First Temple and the subsequent exile of the entire Jewish people.

Obviously, the Talmud does not mean to suggest that one should reject anything a young person suggests and to unconditionally embrace every scintilla of advice from a senior citizen. It merely points to the way emotional and impulsive counsel coming from the young may prove disastrous while the more considered and deliberate counsel of a more experienced individual will, in the long run, prove to be beneficial.

Tzimtzum

The notion that demolition can be constructive is rooted in the teachings of Kabbalah with regard to the very act of Creation.

When G-d created the world, He had to engage in an act of utter demolition. The great Kabbalist, the Arizal, explains that until Creation, "G-d filled all of space" and there was no room for any other form of existence. G-d contracted Himself and created a vacuum, into which He introduced a "line" of light, the channel through which all of the spiritual and physical realms were created.

This process, referred to as *tzimtzum*-contraction, is the Divine form of demolition, without which there could have been no world or reality as we know it. G-d had to totally withdraw and obscure His light to enable the process of creation.

This process of withdrawal and creation enables us to acquire identities that appear independent of G-d. In turn, that empowers us to choose, of our own volition, to reintroduce the Divine light through our observance of Torah and its Mitzvos. Had there not been a tzimtzum, our identities would be totally subsumed within G-d's and we would not really exist.

This is actually the underlying import of the Torah's opening words: "In the beginning G-d (*Elokim*) created the heavens and the earth." The name for G-d used here, *Elokim*, represents that G-dly power of *tzimtzum*, which is instrumental in creation.

Hence the entire process of creation is "demolition" with the intent to build. If G-d had not allowed for the concealing effects of tzimtzum there would be no Universe, let alone a world to inhabit.

We can now understand the reason why the Torah concludes with an allusion to Moses' shattering of the Tablets. Our Sages tell us that in so doing, he prevented the utter destruction of the Jewish people.

The destroyed Tablets were replaced by a second set that was ostensibly inferior to the first set. The fundamental difference between the two sets of Tablets is clearly recorded in the Torah. The first set of Tablets were entirely G-d's handiwork; both the creation of the tablets and the engraving of the Commandments on them. Moses was told to hew the second set of Tablets upon which G-d etched the Ten Commandments.

However, lest one think that the purpose of this demolition-tzimtzum is the desired end, the Torah, in its opening words, alludes to the ultimate purpose of G-d's self-concealment.

Chassidic thought reinterprets the words: "In the beginning G-d created…" The word for "created," *bara,* is given an alternate translation: "revealed" thus rendering the verse as: "The first thing is to reveal (*bara*) that which is hidden (*Elokim*)." The ultimate purpose of the tzimtzum is for the subsequent revelation of G-dly light in the resulting vacuum.

Moses Conceals and Reveals

The second set of Tablets, while they did not radiate the same Divine luminescence as the first set, was actually intended as a means by which the Jewish people could ultimately absorb a higher form of Divine light. Our Sages, in fact, assert that Moses was given and transmitted far more Torah knowledge than he would have received and transmitted had he not shattered the first set of Tablets. From G-dly concealment ultimately comes greater revelation; one that is both superior and easily internalized.

Perhaps, this notion of demolition serving as a prelude to ultimate revelation is hinted in the words "before the eyes of all Israel." This phrase captures the essence of what revelation is: something that was hidden but that all of our eyes can now behold. This is the Torah's way of telling us that Moses' act of destruction and concealment was an act

which contained the seed of our ultimate revelatory experience.

The fact that this message of "demolition for the purpose of building" is alluded to at both the end and beginning of the Torah points to the centrality of the message of concealment in our lives.

The Purpose of Exile

Our exile has been a period of profound concealment. Destruction of the Holy Temple and dispersion of Jews throughout the world caused a drastic reduction of G-dly light, in addition to the difficult physical constraints of exile.

However, for a better understanding of the purpose of our exile we must apply the lesson of the last and first words of the Torah. G-d never intended this period of concealment of His presence as a punishment or as an end unto itself. The exile serves as the concealment that precedes an even greater mode of G-dly revelation transcending that which prevailed in the days of the First Temple.

Moreover, the Midrash states that Moshiach will be revealed and then concealed before he is revealed again. In light of the foregoing analysis of concealment we must

come to the conclusion that this interim period of concealment of Moshiach is intended as a means to bring about an even more magnificent revelation of G-dly light that will be ushered in by Moshiach. The world will become the ultimate G-dly world. May we see the end of all forms of concealment now!

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

VISIBLE TO ALL JEWISH EYES

The name of this parsha read on Simchas Torah, is Beracha, which means blessing.

This captures the essence of Torah which is the the ultimate blessing.

The Torah is not only the greatest form of blessing it is the ultimate source of all blessings!

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

VISIBLE TO ALL JEWISH EYES

Anomaly

The last section of the Torah is an anomaly. This parsha, entitled "*V'zos Haberacha*-And this is the blessing," or just "*Beracha*-Blessing," is never read on a Shabbos. Instead it is read on Simchas Torah (which never occurs on a Shabbos).

It maybe suggested that by not reading this parsha on a Shabbos, as we do for all other Torah portions, our Prophets and Sages (who instituted the division of the Torah into sections and assigned them to be read on a weekly basis) intended to convey a profound message.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad movement, the author of the Tanya, known as the Alter Rebbe) made the famous declaration that "a Jew must live with the times." His son and successor, Rabbi Dovber (known as the Mitteler Rebbe) explained that declaration as meaning that we must live with and draw guidance from

the weekly Torah portion. The key word "time" means time within the context of Torah.

To be sure, all of Torah is relevant to all of us at all times in all places. Nevertheless, there is a special and more pronounced connection between the weekly Torah portion and our lives in the particular week when that portion is read and studied.

It may therefore be suggested that there is a lone exception to this rule, where the message is strongly relevant for every week. This is *Berachah*, the only parsha we don't read on a Shabbos. This parsha contains a general message that relates to every parsha and every week.

This thesis is further buttressed by the fact that our Sages state "everything follows the seal." The end or seal of a prayer, blessing or Torah reading encapsulates all of what has been said before. Moreover, as a seal it protects and preserves that which precedes it.

Torah: The Source and Vessel of Blessing

The name of this parsha, which means blessing, captures the essence of Torah. The theme of blessing is also alluded to in the first letter of the Torah, the letter *beis*, which is the initial of the word *beracha*-blessing. However, while the

concept of blessing is merely hinted in the beginning of the Torah, it is made explicit at the end.

The message that we can derive thus far is that Torah is the ultimate blessing. Moreover, the Torah is not only the greatest form of blessing it is the ultimate source of all blessings!

This notion is based on two premises:

First, our Sages state that the Torah is the "blueprint of creation." Thus, if there can be any blessing in the world it must have been present in the Torah. King David would find comfort in all of his travails when he reflected that all of existence derives its energy from one iota of Torah.

Second, the Talmud concludes with the statement, "G-d could not find a vessel that contains blessing other than the Torah, as it says, "'G-d gave strength to His nation, G-d blessed them with peace." In other words, Torah is the source of peace and peace is the vessel for all blessings. Hence, all blessings can only be contained with Torah.

In effect, Torah serves a dual role in relation to blessing: It is the source and fountain-head of blessing and it is the vessel or instrument through which all blessings can be received.

The Receptacle of the Receptacle

If we take this premise to the next level, it follows that the essence of the blessing associated with Torah is contained in its very last words: "...in the eyes of all Israel."

At this point one may ask what blessing is contained in these final three (in the original Hebrew, that is) words?

Israel

Let's begin with the last word, "Israel." This word can be understood as the ultimate manifestation of the Torah's blessing.

This too is based on two premises:

When G-d introduced the Divine wisdom of Torah to our world, it was predicated on the Jewish people accepting the Torah at Mount Sinai. If we had said no to the Torah, the way other nations responded, the world would have reverted to nothingness. A world without Torah is not the world G-d had in mind when He created it. Without Torah, the world's reason to exist disappears.

In other words, while Torah is the receptacle for all blessings, the Jewish nation is the receptacle for the Torah.

Reciprocity

But, there is a deeper aspect of the relationship between Torah and Israel.

The Zohar describes the relationship between Israel, G-d and the Torah in the following manner:

"There are three knots that are knotted to one another, Israel, Torah and the Holy One, Blessed is He."

The question has been raised: How could the Zohar state that there are three knots, when it would seem that there are only two knots or connections: Israel, with Torah and Torah with G-d!

Chassidic teaching explains that there is a third connection; the connection of G-d directly with Israel which transcends the connection G-d has with Torah.

The reason we need the connection to G-d through Torah, although we have our own innate connection, is that Torah has the power to reveal and actualize latent powers. Without Torah our direct connection with G-d would have remained undeveloped or dormant. Torah is the force that reveals the most powerful connection we have with G-d.

However, once we activate our transcendent connection with G-d through Torah, we then invest some of that transcendence into Torah. Israel, while starting on the

receiving end from Torah, eventually reverses its position and generates a higher Divine energy back into Torah.

What emerges from this analysis is that Israel is both the ultimate vessel and receptacle for the blessing of Torah and in the end it is the source of blessing even in relation to Torah.

"Eyes of All Israel"

So far we have explained how the end of the Torah conveys the message of blessing and how the ultimate blessing is through Torah, and the ultimate blessing through Torah is through the Jewish people.

Still, how do the last three words tie in with the idea of the ultimate blessing?

To understand this let us reflect on the entire verse, which extols Moses' greatness:

> "...and to all of his mighty acts or great and awesome acts which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel."

Why is the fact that he performed these wonders before the eyes of all of Israel emphasized? Isn't his praise based on the fact that he performed the wonders? Would the

wonders have been less impressive if he had not performed them before all of Israel?

G-d's Essence for All

The answer is that the difference between G-d's essence being revealed versus a glimmer of Divine light is expressed by the degree to which all others are aware of it.

The Rebbe, in the last discourse he distributed, explains that if G-d's presence was revealed to every individual sans one, it would mean that G-d's essence is still hidden from everyone. When G-d's essence is fully revealed, everyone will be able to see it.

This then is the ultimate blessing, one which distinguishes exile from Redemption. In exile one can be exposed to the most sublime G-dly light, but not His essence. This explains the disparity in the way people perceive G-dliness. Every person perceives light in a different fashion. In the Messianic Age, G-d's essence will be revealed to all and our essential bond with G-d will be fully apparent. That will be the ultimate blessing

We can now also understand the connection of this parsha, *Berachah*, to Simchas Torah. Simchas Torah has a dual translation: We rejoice with the Torah and the Torah

rejoices with us. We rejoice with the Torah because the Torah reveals our superior relationship with G-d, which, in turn, causes the Torah to rejoice with us because of what we contribute to Torah.

When we dance on Simchas Torah, we should reflect on the ultimate blessing conferred on us by the Torah and the blessing we confer on the Torah as well.

All Eyes Open

This reciprocal relationship will reach its zenith and perfection when these mutual blessings will be made visible for all of Israel with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption!

ESSAY NINETEEN

WE WANT TO BE CLOSE TO MOSES

According to the Ba'al Shem Tov, our desire for food is rooted in our soul's desire to extract the powerful hidden sparks of Divine energy embedded in the food.

When eaten in the proper manner (kosher, with a blessing before and after eating, with the right intent to have strength to do more Mitzvos etc.) these sparks are released and absorbed by the soul.

This gives the soul more energy than it has on its own.

ESSAY NINETEEN

WE WANT TO BE CLOSE TO MOSES

The Enigmatic Holiday

Simchas Torah is an enigmatic Holiday. It marks the end of a cycle of Torah reading and the beginning of a new cycle. It comes after a series of very spiritual days such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Even the festival of Sukkos focuses on the fragility of physical existence.

Yet, with all of its emphasis on Torah, Simchas Torah is a Holiday that focuses on eating and drinking, in addition to the singing and dancing. How does Simchas Torah fit into the spiritual focus of this month? How do we reconcile the fact that Simchas Torah is the climax of the entire spiritual month of Tishrei with its very down-to-earth prominence of the sensual pleasures of food and drink?

Contradictory Reasons

We may approach this paradox by referring to another paradox we find in the Torah reading of Simchas Torah, which records Moses' last words of blessing to the 12 tribes of Israel.

To the Tribe of Gad, Moses said:

> "He saw the first portion because there the plot of the lawgiver is hidden."

Rashi explains this part of the blessing as a reference to the tribe of Gad's desire to inherit the East Bank of the Jordan, the Land that was conquered first. The reason they wanted this particular portion was because they knew that Moses would be interred there in a hidden grave.

This explanation for their choice of land seems to contradict the reason they themselves gave to Moses, recorded in the Book of Numbers (32:1-5). There it states that they had abundant livestock and the grazing area on the East Bank was ample and suited for their livestock needs.

So how is it that in this week's parsha, the Torah alludes to their desire for this area because they wanted to be in close proximity to where Moses would eventually be interred?

Moreover, the reason given earlier relates focuses heavily on their material existence. They needed grazing land for their abundant livestock. Also, the fact that they did not want to cross over the Jordan to be in Israel proper suggests that they were more interested in their worldly possessions than they were interested in the superior holiness of the land on the other side of the Jordan.

Yet, their preference for this land because they wanted to be close to Moses, even in his passing, indicates a sophisticated sensitivity to holiness. Moses, the greatest prophet and transmitter of Torah, as mentioned in this parsha, was the epitome of holiness.

Hence the two explanations are diametrically opposite. The one mentioned explicitly in the Torah is about their preoccupation with materialistic concerns, whereas the reason hinted here reflects their heightened spirituality.

Another question: Why does the Torah make reference to the fact that Moses' place of burial is hidden? Would they have felt differently if the location of Moses' grave was well known?

Two Layers of Attachment to an Ideal

One way of answering these questions is to acknowledge that one may have two intertwined layers of attachment to an ideal.

Our Animal Soul's desire for physical and materialistic things belies the true reason we want them, which is intrinsically spiritual.

According to the Ba'al Shem Tov, our desire for food is rooted in our soul's desire to extract the powerful hidden sparks of Divine energy embedded in the food. When eaten in the proper manner (kosher, with a blessing before and after eating, with the right intent to have strength to do more Mitzvos etc.) these sparks are released and absorbed by the soul. This gives the soul more energy than it has on its own.

The Ba'al Shem Tov's explanation for our physical appetites as an effect of our soul's spiritual appetite, applies here as well. The true, underlying rationale for the Gadites' desire to stay on the East Bank was due to their attachment to Moses. While their Animal Souls, indeed, desired the East Bank of the Jordan because of its economic value (for their animals, which is also a metaphor for their own Animal souls' needs), but, their souls actually wanted this region because of its proximity to the resting place of Moses; a pure spiritual motive.

The Test

One may ask a simple question.

How do we know if our desire for something material is initially and genuinely spiritual? Perhaps it is the other way around; our Animal Soul craves certain pleasures or benefits that have nothing to do with spirituality; using spirituality as a rationalization for something far less noble.

Applying this to the Gadites, how did Moses know that their original thought was spiritual? Perhaps their original materialistic concern was the real driving force behind their request for that piece of land.

The answer lies in their determination to join their brethren in the conquest of the Land of Israel. Moreover, they even volunteered to be in the front lines and not return to their homes on the East Bank until all of their brethren were safely settled on the land. Their self-sacrifice was the proof to Moses that their intentions were indeed noble.

Connection to Simchas Torah

This narrative is always read on Simchas Torah. There must be a lesson for us on this joyous holiday that we can

derive from the two dimensions of the Gadite request for land.

On Simchas Torah Jews customarily drink more than on other Jewish Holidays in keeping with the spirit (pun intended) of the Holiday. Many question this practice. If this is such a holy day, pregnant with spiritual meaning – the day we conclude reading the Torah and begin its reading anew – why do we need the drinks? Isn't the Holiday just an excuse for otherwise sober people to indulge?

The answer is that, on the contrary, the underlying motivation for our joy on this day is not the alcoholic beverages or the gourmet food; it is the desire to be close to G-d, the source of Torah and to Moses the transmitter of Torah, about whose life and passing we read on Simchas Torah. Even those who think they are coming for the other "attractions" are truly motivated by an inner desire to be one with their brethren in expressing their devotion to G-d and the Torah of Moses.

Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah: A Study in Contrasts

This phenomenon is even more pronounced with the Holiday of Simchas Torah, than in other Jewish holidays, including Yom Kippur.

In the former Soviet Union, Jews who were terrified of the evil regime's desire to wipe out Judaism, and would never frequent a synagogue—not even on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—flocked to the synagogues on Simchas Torah. Many did not even know why they were there and how to articulate their collective act of identification with Judaism.

The reason they could not fathom their own reason for coming, not even to rationalize it as a form of defiance and resistance, was because it derived from the deepest, subconscious sanctum of their soul, which defies verbalization and articulation. Speech and even thought tell us what, why, when and how, but they cannot express who we are.

The "who we are" manifests itself on Simchas Torah. Simchas Torah is a totally G-dly experience. The drinking and eating is a consequence of our souls' desire to celebrate its ability to be unfettered; just be its inscrutable, ineffable self.

Yechidah-the Essential Name and the Nameless Essence

One may ask, haven't we made the case on numerous occasions that Yom Kippur is the day, particularly, at the closing prayer of N'eilah, when our *Yechidah*, the essence of our soul, is revealed. What then distinguishes the Festival

of Simchas Torah from Yom Kippur? And why do we need two Holidays, so close in proximity to each other, to express the same, profound soul essence? Furthermore, aren't these two Holidays opposites? On Yom Kippur we desist from all physical pleasure, whereas on Simchas Torah we indulge?

The answer lies in the designation of the Yechidah as the essence of the soul. In truth, the Rebbe taught that the Yechidah, is actually one of the five names of the soul mentioned in the Midrash and Zohar. A name, by definition, has a descriptive function. The true essence of the soul cannot be captured by a name.

This premise explains the difference between the soul's essence that is revealed on Yom Kippur and that which is revealed on Simchas Torah. On Yom Kippur, the highest and most essential name of the soul is expressed. But, as essential as the name Yechidah is, it is still a name, an identity. On Simchas Torah, however, it is the essence itself that is revealed that transcends even its most sublime name and identity.

This explains the most salient difference between the two Holidays. To be receptive to the Yechidah-essence of the soul on Yom Kippur we must remove our involvement with the most physical aspects of life; no eating drinking etc. This is so because even the Yechidah is a name and is cast

in a mold that is inconsistent with the material world. We don't fast on Yom Kippur because the Torah wants us to suffer but rather it wants us to be unencumbered by the physical so that we can express our deepest soul-powers.

On Simchas Torah, when the true essence of the soul is revealed, not just its essential name, no contradiction to the soul's essence exists because it is not cast in a mold and has no identity, which can be contradicted by another identity. It is the soul baring itself and is not at all "threatened" by feasting.

Moreover, not only is the soul not intimidated by the food and drink of Simchas Torah, it revels in the celebration. When the essence is revealed it manifests itself on every level; form the deepest spiritual to the most basic physical.

We can now return to the question why the Gadites wanted to be close to Moses' hidden burial place. This alludes to the fact that their desire for the land was truly an expression of their soul's essential bond with Moses' inscrutable essence, which was reflected in the fact that no one could even find Moses grave.

Simchas Torah is thus the ultimate expression of Moshiach because Moshiach possesses the ultimate expression of the soul's essence and will usher in an age of Redemption when we will have a perpetual Simchas Torah. We will then express our soul's essential connection with the essence of

Torah, Moses and Moshiach, and ultimately be on with G-d's essence.

ESSAY TWENTY

THE THREE-PLIED BLESSING

Chassidus explains that a blessing obtained through prayer may not materialize in the most optimum and efficient fashion.

Even the powerful and persistent prayer of the saintly Choni, did not yield immediate results.

Torah, conversely, has the capacity to make the Divine blessings materialize quickly and efficiently.

ESSAY TWENTY

THE THREE-PLIED BLESSING

Moses' Unique Blessing

The very last portion in the Torah begins with Moses' final blessing of his people. The Torah introduces this blessing with the words: "This is the blessing that Moses, the man of G-d blessed the children of Israel."

The opening word, "T**his**" implies that there is something unique about this blessing. To understand what is unique, the Midrash furnishes the following comment:

> Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman said:
>
> "When Moses was about to bless Israel, the Torah and the Holy One, Blessed is He [also], arrived to bless Israel."

The Midrash proceeds to show how, in addition to Moses' role in the blessing, G-d and Torah also participated:

> "This is the blessing – This is a reference to Torah as it says, 'This is the Torah that Moses placed before the children of Israel.'"
>
> "That Moses blessed – This refers to Moses."
>
> "The man [ish] of G-d – This is a reference to the Holy One, blessed is He, as it says, 'G-d is Master [Ish] of war.'"

The Midrash then asks a rhetorical question, "Why all this?" In other words, why was it necessary for Moses' blessing to be augmented by G-d and the Torah?

The Midrash replies:

> "To fulfill that which is stated, 'a three-ply cord is not easily severed!'"

The Midrash seems to suggest that Moses' final blessing was unique. It was more than a one-sided blessing. It consisted of three different strands, spun together, forming a strong rope that cannot easily be unraveled.

What is the significance of these three aspects of the blessing: Moses, G-d and Torah?

We also need to clarify the order of the three sources of blessing enumerated in this verse: Torah, Moses and G-d. Why is Torah listed first, Moses second and G-d third? One

would have thought that G-d would come before Torah and Moses!

Obstructions in the Pipeline

In truth, all blessings come from G-d. That is a given. However, blessings that come from G-d can be obstructed from our view because of our inability to accept them in the moment. Chassidus explains that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur G-d allocates all of the good things we ask for, but we still have to pray for them every day. The reason for this is that while G-d has allocated the blessings, they may get stuck in the pipeline. To ensure that the blessings descend "downward" and enter our realm, our own efforts are needed, particularly prayer.

However, even if a blessing materializes in our physical world, we may still not benefit from it because we have no vessel capable of receiving it. Blessings have been compared to rain which descends on a field. While the rain can be the greatest blessing for the earth it can also go to waste if we haven't plowed and planted the field in preparation.

To guarantee that Moses' final blessing would be effective, three conditions were needed.

Smooth Sailing through Torah

First, the blessing must come down to us through Torah.

Chassidus explains that a blessing obtained through prayer may not materialize in the most optimum and efficient fashion. Proof of this is found in the Talmudic story of Choni Hama'agel. He was the sage who drew a circle around himself and stated he would not leave it until G-d brought rain to the drought-stricken land. After three days of prayer the rain finally came down but only in droplets. When Choni "complained" to G-d that rain droplets would not be much use to anyone, it began to come down in torrents. When he pointed out the destructive nature of torrential rain, it finally descended in the proper measure.

From this we see that even the powerful and persistent prayer of a saintly man, such as Choni, does not necessarily yield immediate results. Even when his prayers finally began to work, he needed to tweak the result with additional prayers.

Torah, conversely, has the capacity to make the Divine blessings materialize quickly and efficiently. The Zohar relates that once there was a drought in Israel. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar, "merely" delivered a Torah discourse on the words "How goodly it is for brothers to dwell together" and the rain descended adequately. Through the medium of Torah, the blessings

were able to "sail" through all the lower and higher worlds and successfully produce unimpeded and unambiguous positive results.

Torah Power

Why is Torah capable of doing that which prayer cannot accomplish?

One explanation is that G-d screened His own light when He created the world. For we mortals, who live in a world of darkness, particularly in this extended period of exile, even prayer has its limits. Even our souls, which are a part of G-d, must go through a screening process so that they can "fit" into our physical bodies. Therefore, our best and most fervent prayers, the ones that stem from the depths of our souls, may not be able to channel G-d's blessings into our lives without tremendous exertion.

Conversely, Torah, as Divine wisdom, does not undergo a fundamental change as it is transmitted to us. The Torah that we study is unmitigated and unadulterated G-dly wisdom. Therefore, a blessing connected to Torah has no impediments along the way to us.

This explains why it is customary for a *chosson*-groom to be called up to the Torah on the Shabbos before his

wedding. Since Torah is the prime source of unobstructed energy, any blessing that travels with it is likewise unhindered, and results in the ultimate blessing for the newlyweds.

Source of Peace

Another characteristic of Torah is that it is the source of peace. The Talmud states that G-d gave us Torah to bring peace to the world. Our Sages teach us that there is no greater vessel for receiving blessings than peace. Thus, the Torah of peace is the ultimate vehicle and vessel to make us receptive to the Divine blessings.

This explains why the first aspect of Moses' blessing is Torah, because it represents the most ideal source of blessing.

A "Moses" Blessing

After the Torah alludes to itself as the medium of Divine blessing, the Torah lists the second component of the ideal blessing as coming from Moses.

While it is true that blessings which come from and through Torah are more efficiently channeled to and

absorbed by us, it makes a difference **who** bestows the blessing.

The Talmud states that no one should underestimate the blessing of even a simple person. How much more so a blessing from the greatest person that ever lived: Moses?

Moreover, if the Torah is the greatest source of blessing, who better than Moses, who personified Torah, to bless us? Indeed. In this parsha, the very last one of the Torah, Moses is identified with Torah: "Torah was commanded to us by Moses as an inheritance to the Assembly of Jacob." Torah and Moses were inseparable. So, if the ideal blessing is through Torah, who better to channel Torah's blessings than Moses?

Moses the Lover of Israel

Moreover, the Talmud states that Moses was blessed with a "good eye;" always eager to share whatever he had with the Jewish people. Moses was the ultimate "lover of Israel" and was willing to give up everything, even his connection to Torah, for Israel.

Indeed, his desire to sacrifice all that was precious to him is expressed in the very last verse of the Torah, in which Moses is extolled for what he did "in the presence of all

Israel." Rashi comments that this refers to the shattering of the Tablets, which saved the Jewish people from destruction when they worshipped the Golden Calf. Moses' passion for the Jewish people was even greater than his love for Torah.

Hence, Moses' blessing to the Jewish people was even more formidable than a blessing that comes through the medium of Torah alone. Moses was inseparable from Torah and even more inseparable from the Jewish people, the recipients of his blessing.

Lover of G-d

The Torah then describes the third unique characteristic of Moses' final blessing – his relationship with G-d.

It is well known that Moses personified Torah and identified totally with the Jewish people to the point of total self-sacrifice for them.

But Moses was also the most G-dly person ever to have lived. No prophet like Moses ever arose. Moses was "on call" to receive G-d's communication to him 24/7. Maimonides describes Moses as the most exalted human being. There were no barriers between him and G-d other than that he was G-d's creation. No other barriers existed.

This threefold connection is expressed by the Zohar in another way: "There are three things that are knotted together, Israel, Torah and the Holy One, blessed is He."

Moses' final blessing incorporated these three entities and their intertwined unity in the most formidable fashion.

We will be privileged to see the fruition of this three-stranded blessing with the imminent coming of Moshiach, when all three entities will fully be revealed. G-d's essence, the Torah's essence, the essence of the Jewish people and their fundamental interconnection, will be revealed in full view of the entire world.